

# Rejoicing in God, Living Unto God

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*The sermon emphasizes the joy of our identity in Christ, the hope of our salvation, and the call to live holy lives amidst trials.*

**Duration:** 1:39:28

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 1:15

**Topics:** "Rejoice"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of fixing one's hope completely on the salvation offered by God. He urges the audience to not be conformed to their former lusts and to instead live as obedient children of God. The speaker also references the story of Job, highlighting the humbling experience Job had when confronted by God's questions. The sermon concludes with a call to action, urging the audience to gird up their minds and focus on the countenance-lifting truths found in the Bible.

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## Transcript

Our reading this evening is taken from 1 Peter, chapter one. So as we read this passage, let's do so with hearts that are hungry to hear from the Lord. First, Peter, chapter one.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the father in sanctification of the spirit for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been aggrieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen you love. Though now you do not see him yet believing, you rejoice with joy, inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation, the prophets have inquired and searched carefully who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what or what manner of time the spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow to them.

It was revealed that not to themselves, but to us, they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things which angels desire to look into, therefore, gird up your gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lust as in your ignorance, but as he who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct because it is written, be holy for I am holy. And if you call on the father who, without partiality, judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear, knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

He, indeed, was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through him believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit, in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible through the word of God, which lives and abides forever because all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass, the grass withers and its flower falls away. But the word of the Lord endures forever.

Now, this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. Well, may the Lord add his blessing to the reading of his word. Let's turn our hearts and seek our king together.

Let's pray. Our great and everlasting God, when we think of who you are, Lord, when we think of who we are, God, what a gap there is between us, what a chasm, what an infinite gulf. And yet, God, you have not waited for us to seek you out, you have not waited for us to build some type of a bridge of our own righteousness, of our good intentions.

God, you have not left us in the darkness and the hopelessness of self-will and self-righteousness. Lord, we've sung it, we've read it here in the councils eternally. You turned your heart toward humanity and you love the people.

God, we do not understand why in the everlasting past, knowing our sin, why those councils were not for the destruction of every one of Adam's race. Why, God, did you choose to send mercy alongside justice? Why are you so rich in your kindness and compassion toward those who, if left to ourselves, we would have preferred death to you? But God, you have stirred our hearts, you have sent your son, you have made him to be our elder brother, our kinsman, one of us, one of us carried the law, one of us died, one of us was raised and one of us now sits at your right hand ruling over all the world's alone. And so, God, we come to you through the finished work of your son.

We come to you through the work of the God-man and we plead, Lord, turn your face toward us, a reconciled face, stretch out your arm, God. We thank you for the great work you've done in the past, but we cannot afford a God of history only. It is the I am that we depend upon at this present moment.

Lord, we have no plan B. If you do not still work, just as you said you worked in the Bible, if you do not still use your spirit, if he does not still awaken souls and preserve us and help us, then, God, we of all people are most to be pitied. So we turn our face to you, God, and we ask that you'd meet us at that great mercy seat in heaven. We ask for mercy, Lord, because we have sinned against you.

We ask for grace because there is much yet to do. When we look at our lives, we realize that Jesus Christ deserves every aspect. We want him to receive the glory due to him in our homes, the way we talk to our spouse, the way we raise our children, God, the way we sing and pray tonight.

And for this, God, we are completely dependent. Father, we ask that you would give us today all the grace we need to do all your good pleasure, that our heartfelt response would be thorough. That we would put away the half measures that have so often, God, robbed us of walking with you, robbed you of the glory due to you.

God, we pray that you would do these things for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. It's not ours because of your past kindnesses, Lord, we are bold to ask for more. So stretch out your hand, God, and we ask that what we read in the scripture, that which we read might be this which we experience today.

God, we pray that our lives would be. Able to see more clearly than ever who you are and Lord, then to turn and reflect it to those around us. Do these things, God, for the glory of your son.

We ask it in his name. Amen. As always, it is a very great joy for me to be with you and I thank you for the privilege of coming once again and opening the word of the Lord.

My dear wife, Maggie, whom I spoke with this afternoon, wished to send her greetings and her regrets that she could not be here also. Now, this doesn't normally happen to me, but I had prepared some time ago for these three days with you. And then when I got to Grace Church in Memphis, I felt that what I had prepared for you, I should give to them.

And that made me think I was supposed to give something else to you that couldn't get beyond where I was there. So I'm going to share with you what I gave to them, essentially. This first chapter of First Peter, like all of Peter's writings, is absolutely magnificent.

The structure itself is very special and the truth that it portrays, glorious indeed. We have three nights together and we'll cover the chapter. But obviously, in three nights, there'll be portions that we'll just sort of treat to, not as carefully as others, but I hope to have a word to say on every line.

But before we turn directly to First Peter 1, I want to call to your remembrance a passage from the Old Testament that I know I have spoken to you concerning on some former occasion. It's a passage that is indeed familiar to you. It's found in the book of Genesis, Chapter 4, and it provides an excellent lesson, which I think is essential as we approach this first chapter of First Peter.

So we begin with Genesis, Chapter 4, the incident most of you will know well. Now, the man, that is Adam, had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said, I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord.

And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.

And Abel on his part also brought to the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and for his offering, he had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

Then the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you, but you must master it. And Cain told Abel his brother, and it came about when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him. And the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel, your brother? And he said, I do not know.

Am I my brother's keeper? And God said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And when I spoke on this passage, I remember stressing very, very strongly the absolute fact that each of us must squarely face. Sin is crouching at our door.

Its desire is toward us, and we must master it. Isn't it truly pathetic that when God spoke those words so plainly and directly to Cain, he did not gasp out, Oh, God, help me, but instead obviously grew angry. And I imagine when he told his brother what God had said to him, he probably said something like, What right does he have to speak to me that way? And we would imagine that Abel urged him to pay attention to what the Lord said, and in huge anger he rose up and killed his brother.

Now the probability of someone here getting that angry and slaying a brother may not be very great, but how conscious have you been over the last week that sin is crouching at your door? How often have you realized its desire is toward you? And how many times have you mastered sin? Isn't it tragic that the bulk of the church in America doesn't have the faintest idea how one would go about mastering sin if they ever became aware that sin was crouching at the door? But that's not the subject and not the reason why I drew the passage to your attention tonight. Rather, it's what the Lord said about the countenance of Cain. Why is your countenance turned down? And then followed by the statement, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is toward you, you must master it.

But that's preceded by, if you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? One of the remarkably splendid things about 1 Peter chapter 1 is that it begins really with a list of 12 things that have incredible capacity to turn the countenance upward. That's where we will begin tonight. And then those 12 countenance-affecting truths are followed by a series of five very short and very significant commands, verses 13 to 16.

Then that series of five commands is followed by three prods, words from the Holy Spirit to get us moving in the right direction. And then the chapters cut with an absolutely magnificent portion on the seed. So it's my intent, God helping us to deal with those things these three nights.

But let's begin with this issue, as I said, of the countenance being turned up. So back then to 1 Peter and chapter 1. And let me rather quickly, but I hope adequately, draw to your attention these 12 matters that are so powerful in raising the countenance upward. Verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.

Now if I say I chose God, that won't have much impact on my countenance. But when I face the reality that God chose me, that has tremendous power to lift the countenance. I know an awful lot of people who say they have chosen God, but that hasn't altered them in any observable way.

But when you know God has chosen you, when you are aware that your response to Christ was not initiated by yourself, but by God himself. And you know that God doesn't make bad choices. Now very often, when we look at ourselves, we think God has made a bad choice.

After a series of dreadful failures, after waves of doubt have swept over us, we sometimes wonder whether indeed anybody thinking the way I think, speaking the way I speak, acting the way I speak, could possibly be a Christian. But that really is nicely resolved in the realization that I have been chosen. And I'd like to ask, has that realization lifted your countenance? Obviously, if you think you're a Christian because you chose God, that's more apt to elevate your pride than your countenance.

Let it really grip you. The Almighty God, who has never ever made a mistake, chose you. Then verse 2 has a magnificent aspect as well.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood. May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. Isn't it wonderful that salvation is not something God had to dream up because he was taken by surprise at Adam's sin? And it is not something he had to adjust somewhere in your lifetime because you proved to be a great disappointment to him.

Salvation was planned before the earth was made. And you were part of God's plan. And to assure you that despite your multitude of frailties and your repeated sins, nonetheless, God had a plan for you that guaranteed what he started to do, he would finish finally.

And if your countenance doesn't turn up at the realization that salvation is God's doings and he never fails in anything he sets out to do, I'm beginning to be worried about you. I'm sure that some of you, like me, have in very important areas of life made determinations that you wish you were in a position to see that they happen. As many of you know, Maggie and I have only two children, a son and a daughter.

A son, who by God's grace, loves and serves him. And a daughter, who by God's grace, loves and serves him. But our daughter cannot serve the way our son can because she has an incurable brain disorder.

She is a schizophrenic, a sweet and lovely girl with great confidence in the Lord but lacking in those normal abilities. It's been astonishing, despite her severe handicap, how many lives she has touched. She had nearly a dozen people in church a short time ago who came because of her testimony.

But my point is this, I didn't will a sick daughter. None of you who have sick children, willed sick children. We will a thing and nothing happens.

But God wills a matter and it is accomplished. And God willed your full salvation and it's going to happen just the way God willed it. And I think that has the capacity to turn the countenance.

Numbers 3, verse 3. Listen to these words. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So, as magnificent as it is that God chose us, and as absolutely fabulous as it is to realize that this is his eternal plan, isn't it magnificent that he himself brought new life to our dead souls, quickened us, made us alive and by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ guaranteed the finality of our salvation.

And again, if your countenance has been drooping, it's because you haven't been looking at the truth adequately. And what a lovely thing to know that these things have been accomplished by our God who has never, ever failed. We have been born again to a living hope.

Now, I don't believe that's something merely aimed at the future. That has to do with every single day of our lives. And let me ask you, are you constantly in the grip of a living hope? I remember one time when you permitted me to speak to you, I gave a brief series out of Hebrews chapter 11.

I remember saying on that occasion that Hebrews 11.1 makes it clear that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And when a person has been given faith, that faith transforms their thinking, their attitude, their action so that that which is to be hoped for and that which is unseen has greater impact upon the daily life than that which has the ability to be touched, to be handled, to be lifted, to be smelled, to be tasted. The living hope where every day of our lives we are much more certain of that which is to come than we are of that which is.

And it profoundly impacts us on a daily basis. Then notice what is said in verse 4, obviously the fourth of the things that I'm calling to your attention. To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

How many of you have had an inheritance that faded away? I was led to believe for a number of years as a younger man that I was the favorite of a wealthy uncle and that at his passing a substantial inheritance would be mine. But it didn't happen. Apparently the lawyers got most of it and somebody else managed to get the rest.

But isn't it incredible that the inheritance that God has reserved for you, no lawyer can steal, no scoundrel can skim. Everything the Lord has for you is so fixed by God himself that it is untouchable as far as anyone else is concerned. Now it's not that we're giving over to great longings for material things.

I'm sure there are a number of you right in the room tonight who've been scratching along in the dirt trying to make ends meet and would be very grateful for an earthly inheritance. But the inheritance before us in verse 4 is worth an awful lot more than any earthly inheritance. But let it turn up your countenance when you think to yourself, my inheritance cannot be stolen from me.

It cannot even be eroded by government interference and taxes. Everything that God designed as part of my inheritance is absolutely mine. But then notice the next verse, number 5. Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Now suppose that the attorneys and the others who managed to get the inheritance I had been told was mine. Suppose that they had failed and that the inheritance did turn out to be every bit as great as I was led to believe. But suppose I died before the uncle.

Wouldn't have mattered how big the inheritance. And it wouldn't have mattered whether somebody else managed to get a chunk of it or not. Obviously an inheritance is no good if you don't live long enough to receive it.

And isn't it incredible that not only is our inheritance protected, but the heir is protected. There's not a danger in all the world that anyone whom God has chosen is going to miss out on the inheritance that God intended for them. And even if you make a muck of things someday next week, God has the ability and the will to straighten out the mess you've made and to put you back on target.

And he's not going to let anybody rob you of your inheritance. And he's not going to let anything keep you from being the heir that he made you. You know, I'm speaking about the countenance.

You get a hold of these things and you begin to really believe them and your countenance can't help but turn upward. Look at what follows in verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice even though now for a little while it is necessary you have been distressed by various trials. Well, I should be surprised if there are not some here in the room this evening who are experiencing some very heavy trials.

Now, some of our trials that are very annoying and troubling aren't really that important. At the time I left home a week ago, our furnace, we had this big building and one of these old-fashioned boilers. And you walk into the boiler room and you almost quiver because it's so old and complicated looking and you wonder what's going to happen next.

But anyway, when I left home, two of the valves that regulate the heat on the top floor had frozen. One froze closed and one froze open. That meant the top half of one side was freezing cold and the top half of the other side boiling hot.

So the man that maintains the equipment said, I'll come and try and prop open the one that's closed tight. And he succeeded magnificently. So my dear wife, all last week, was sweltering with 85 degree temperature.

Now, when you're enduring that or when you're enduring 45 degree temperature indoors, it's a trial. But it's not all that big a trial. But some of you have had some very great trial.

And indeed, any number of us might have even bigger trials in the weeks to come. But here is a perfectly magnificent word about trials. In this, you greatly rejoice, even though now for a while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.

Whatever your trials are, let your countenance be lifted because God is the author of trials. And God is the one who graciously uses trials in our lives to strengthen our walk with him and to enable us to live more and more to the praise of his glory. And God never allows a trial so great that we cannot bear up under it.

Now, these are all truths that you know. But when you get 12 of them together, you ought to pay attention. And they ought to have some powerful impact upon your countenance.

Look at what follows. Seven, that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And again, you face the reality of those precious words that God himself is at work in a perfectly glorious way in you so that you may truly bring praise, glory, and honor to Jesus Christ.

When we get hold of at least something of the divine purposes, of the plan of our great and gracious God for us, it ought not to turn our countenance down. It surely ought to lift our countenance, even when it's such a severe trial as the loss of your closest loved one or the loss even of an infant child or when it's bankruptcy. Whatever it is, everything that happens to us because we are under God's gracious discipline has the ability to fill us with hope and praise and wonder and love.

Look at the next statement that we have here. Number eight. And though you have not seen him, you love him.

And though you do not see him now, but believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy unspeakable. Now, did Cain greatly rejoice with joy unspeakable? Well, obviously, no. When God reminded him of the peril he faced, he persevered in anger.

Think of how gracious God was to speak to Cain and to tell him that sin was crouching at his door. Have you not gone long periods of time having lost the awareness that sin was crouching at your door? Have not multitudes of people plunged into the depth of iniquity because God did not confront them like he confronted Cain and remind them that sin was crouching at the door? Oh, what a difference would have occurred if God had heard Cain cry out, Help me! What a blessed thing it is that each of us can truly cry out, Help! And the Lord will hear and will answer and will enable us to rejoice with joy unspeakable. Now, the nature of most of us is when something awful happens, then we have a season of downturn and countenance.

If I may speak in a very personal way, when I was defrauded by Wheaton College and they ended up with my library on revival, I was very badly injured. There were days when I just was so bewildered by what had happened that I hardly knew what to think or say or do. I remember so clearly.

First, I got really angry at the college and the Graham Association, which working together had defaulted in an agreement we had. Then, I got angry at God for letting them do the wretched thing they did. Then, I got angry at myself for getting angry at them and at God.

And I thought, how could any man who's a Christian be as angry as I have been? Then, in utter frustration, not knowing what else to do, being unable to think straight, I thought, I'll go upstairs in our house and I'll paint some bedroom ceilings. And while I'm up there on the ladder with a roller in my hand, these words come to me. You got it all wrong.

Got what wrong? You misinterpreted. What happened? What do you mean? You've become doubtful that I even exist. But what happened to you is confirmation of what you yourself have preached about.

All men are liars. Everybody seeks their own, not the good of another. Why, that came to me in such a fashion that if I hadn't been alert to what was going on, I would have fallen right off the ladder.

But, almost immediately, when that realization came to me, my countenance was turned up. And I began to thank God for what had happened. Because, you see, God always has some purpose in those things He allows.

In that particular instance, I had been deeply interested in revival for a very long time, had preached upon it in many places, had encouraged people to join together in prayer for revival. But almost without my realizing it, what had started in my heart had risen to my head. Did that ever happen to any of you? At one time, you were truly passionate about Christ and His kingdom.

Then it became more of an intellectual issue than a heart issue. You see, through that experience, passion for revival came back to my heart. So I rejoiced then.

I rejoice now. I, naturally, as a mere simple human being, could wish that the necessary change had come about in an easier way. But, thank God, the change occurred.

Have you learned to be truly grateful for those things that happen, that seem adverse? Can you truly say that you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory? And then look at what follows. Verse 9 and point 9. Obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. Now, here in this passage, obviously, salvation, as in many other places in the New Testament, is an eschatological term.

Some of us err greatly in that we pinpoint salvation as something that is past. Well, thank God we have been saved, but, thank God even more, we're being saved. And thank Him even more still because we shall be saved.

It doesn't start good work and leave us dangling. And here in this lovely 9th verse, let me read it again. Obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Oh, what a matter for brightening the countenance that God is indeed at work through all that is transpiring in our lives in saving our souls. Number 10, verse 10. As to the salvation, the prophets who prophesy of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating.

Have you rejoiced? Because you got something that never came to Isaiah. You got something that Jeremiah did not know. You got something that Ezekiel missed, that Daniel missed, that Hosea missed.

And all the prophets, they sought diligently, but they never quite got it. And we, by the grace of God, little simple people like us, not great men like the prophets, little people like us, have the glorious gift. I have rejoiced many times in recent years in saying to people, salvation is not so much an experience as it is a person.

And isn't it wonderful that when that aged Simeon was in the temple and Mary and Joseph came in carrying the babe and Simeon reached out and the babe was handed to him and he held the babe and he said to God, now you can let your servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen your salvation. Isn't it an incredible blessing that while the prophets never knew the person of Christ, we do? Though they searched diligently, they never really got a hold of what God has granted to us, the personal glorious opportunity of a walk with Christ, whom we know and love. If that doesn't turn your countenance up, there's something deeply wrong in you.

And then finally, as it is stated in verse 12, things into which angels long to look. Now naturally we think of angels as superior beings to us, but they never got salvation and to us has been granted eternal salvation. Not because we chose God, as I've already said, not because we were in any way worthy, not because our performance lives up to the required standard, but because God himself has graciously given to us that which we cannot earn and most certainly do not deserve, but rejoice concerning with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Now, with those 12 things in front of us, look now at the series of five commands that follow, starting at verse 13. Let me read them again. Therefore, gird your minds for action.

Number one, keep sober in spirit. Number two, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Number four, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.

And number five, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourself also in all your behavior, because it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. So 12 glorious countenance lifters and then a series of five very explicit commands, not suggestions, not even invitations, but absolute commands, none of which Cain could have or would have hearkened to. And multitudes who call themselves Christians are completely disinterested in commands like these, but being preceded by these 12 countenance lifters.

Every person here tonight should be ready constantly to obey these 12 commands. Number one, gird up your mind for action. Now, obviously, when you talk about girding up, you're talking about garments that in their natural state interfere.

The last Sunday I was home, it was truly frigid, and I noticed that when we went to church, almost all of the ladies, and there are many in the north who think wearing pants to church is almost like blasphemy, but almost all the ladies either had long skirts down to their ankles or they had on some kind of appropriate slacks. We had the Sunday a while back when the actual temperature was 27 degrees below zero, and then we had a windchill factor, and the windchill was 87 below zero. Now, how well can you run if you got a skirt down around your ankle? So the setting is perfectly obvious, isn't it? And here the call is to gird up your minds for action.

Remember in Exodus 12, 11, in connection with Passover preparations, now you shall eat in this manner with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. In other words, get ready to move. What a tragedy that multitudes in the church have not girded up their minds.

They're still letting their minds drift like free-flowing garments. But let's be personal. How about you? Have you realized that this is no time for sitting about? This is no time for relaxed Christianity.

This is no time to leave things in the hands of others. This is a time for every believer to gird up their minds. What a phenomenal difference would occur very suddenly if every believer was fully girded and ready for action.

We live almost contrary to this a great deal of the time. Many people of my acquaintance act as if they have at least 100,000 years to get serious. But any kind of serious consideration says we don't have much time at all.

Gird up your loins for action, as they did in preparation for the Passover. Or listen to this quotation from 1 Kings 18.46, Then the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins. And he outran Ahab to Jezreel.

And let me kindly but pointedly ask, is your mind girded up for action? I could ask pastor what percentage of the congregation he thinks lives continually with girded mind. I won't do that. And perhaps if I did, he would not reply.

And I expect it would be inappropriate even for me to do that. But it's not inappropriate for me to ask you, is your mind girded for action? Are you truly prepared to serve the Lord fully and completely with no hindrances? Now consider, if you will, what it's like to try and serve with an ungirded mind. Obviously, if you wear long garments, not girded up, they're likely to trip you up on the way.

Now some of us, I mean, think how kind dear Pastor John is in putting this down on the floor. He's not sure if I come in and out of that pulpit that I won't fall. And I can't seem to stay in any pulpit.

I don't know why. Maybe it's just some weakness in me. But I just like to be close where I can see whom I'm talking to.

But imagine now, you know, once in a while I get invited to preach in the church where I cannot wear my common clothes, where I've got to wear a black robe right down to the soles of my feet. Now imagine getting in and out of a pulpit that has 12 steps with a long flowing robe. Is there any way that you are

endangered in your mind of tripping because you have not girded up your mind? We see an awful lot of people who fall flat on their faces.

A big chunk of the church looks as if they don't know what they're doing, as if they are forever being tangled up in ungirded robes. How about you? Ask these questions to your own heart. After all, the glory of Christ is at stake.

And the eternal well-being of multitudes can be harmed by our failure to gird up our minds. But not only do long robes have the possibility of tripping us up, they can hinder our progress and impede our efficiency. Oh yes, you can walk in a long flowing garment, but you have to walk more nimbly.

And there is much greater danger of tripping up than if your garments were truly girded up. I think without my stretching this on indefinitely, you get the notion, don't you? Imagine now, a long flowing garment on a muddy street. And how long would there be cakes of mud on the hem of the garment? When I was a youth, I spent a summer in Southern California picking apricots.

You ever tried to pick apricots in California? You can't help but shake the tree a little when you're about to task. So all around the tree are ripe apricots that mix in with the sticks and the weeds and the mud. And imagine climbing a ladder with six inches of that corruption on the bottom of your shoes.

Tough going. But the ungirded mind has that capacity to build up the kind of debris that will truly hinder you from accomplishing the very purpose for which God called you. And also, a long flowing garment will catch on the thorns and the other obstructions.

I mean, sometimes we walk through narrow stone passageways where there are projections out on the stones that could easily lay hold of the garment. I'll go no further with this. I'll simply plead with each of you in the light of these 12 glorious countenance lifters.

Gird up the loins of your mind. And I do want to add, do you remember Job? Can you recall those chapters, chapter after chapter after chapter, where his friends are helping him? And you go through those dialogues where they're accusing Job and Job is defending himself. And it just becomes tedious as you read it.

And then suddenly, God appears on the scene and he says, gird up the loins of your mind. I will ask, you answer me. And then God hurls at Job a series of questions of such consequence that poor Job is forced to cover his mouth and say, I have spoken.

Now I don't dare say any more. And after that first round, then God says again, now you gird up your minds and you listen to me. And again, another series of questions.

And when it's all over, Job says, I have heard of you with the hearing of the air, but now my eyes see you. And I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. I certainly hope God will not have to treat you like he treated Job.

And confront you with a series of questions as he did Job. Instead, let each of us set our hearts tonight to truly gird up our minds for action. And let me just add one other thought.

Do you know how long it took me to get to be 81? Oh, you say that's easy, 81 years. Yeah, but you know how fast those years went by? I feel about 30. Last year, we were in the middle of December, and I was

sort of thinking maybe this is about February 1. The older you get, the faster life seems to fly.

And what a pitiful thing if instead of girding up your minds for action, you think, well, that's something I must do, but not now because suddenly you'll be aware that you're as old as I am and that if you manage to get your mind girded up, you won't have much time to live with a girded mind. You young people, your parents, everyone who is here, in the light of these 12 countenance lifters, gird up your minds for action. Number two, keep sober in spirit.

Now we all know something about drunkards. Hopefully nothing by way of personal experience. Indeed, I dare to hope that you don't even have a drunkard in your family.

But most of us know more about drunkards than we wish. And let's just think for a moment. Now here, this second order is to be sober in spirit.

Now, when describing a drunkard, which is obviously the opposite to being sober, what would we say if we were to speak of a drunkard? Would we not say that a drunkard has an inability to hold a course? That's why when a drunkard is pulled over by the state patrol, they may ask him to walk on that white line. Oh, I can do that all right. I can assure you I can do that fine.

I won't have any difficulty. And that's the way a lot of people live. Inability to stay a course.

What a tragedy to be a spiritual drunkard even if by God's grace you've abstained from excess alcohol, yet you're not sober in spirit. Also when we speak about a drunkard, we're bound to speak about foolish and blurred speech. Did you ever listen to a drunkard give a speech? He stands there thinking he has made the most brilliant statement ever made in the history of mankind and you sit there shaking your head and saying, oh, what a tragedy.

What might have been once an intelligent human being with the capacity of doing good has made an absolute public idiot of himself. And when you're drunk in spirit, the same thing happens. You speak all kinds of religious things but they're garbled and they're not in any way helpful.

Indeed, isn't it tragic when you meet a boy whose father is a well-known preacher but the son has never seen anything but garbled nonsense in the life of his father as if his father went through life a spiritual drunkard. May I believe concerning you that you are sober in spirit and you know perfectly well how a drunkard flies into a rage and expresses a fierceness that is truly tragic. Why, a drunkard can go home and he can beat his mother to the ground.

Then he meets one of you ladies on the street and he rushes up and gives you a hug and a kiss on the cheek. The drunkard is all twisted up in his ability to even know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. And of course, one of the most obvious qualities of a drunkard is at the time when there's a necessity of alertness, he falls asleep.

And he may fall asleep right in the center of a busy street. Now I believe that when Jeremiah the prophet in the 13th chapter described the problem of spiritual drunkenness, he could very well have been describing the religious situation in the United States of America in 2013. And we can't do anything about those out there.

And this message is not to those who are not present, but to you. Are you sober in spirit? Maybe what you need to do is to go home after the meeting and say, will you reveal to me, Lord, every area where I am

lacking in appropriate sobriety. Look at the third of these commands.

Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now I spoke earlier referring to Hebrews 11.1, saying that faith actually provides substance for the things that are hoped for, provides more than ample evidence of the things that are not seen. Now here we are called upon to fix our hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Let me tenderly ask, what percentage of you is fixed on the hope? And what percentage of you is governed by the demands, seeming demands, of the hour? Now preachers are no exception. We all have to have money. We cannot live in our contemporary society without it.

And we have to earn it, like everybody else. But it's so easy to be discontent with our wages. Do you remember when John the Baptist was speaking so profoundly in Luke chapter 3? And then there was a series of those who asked him, what should we do? And he said to one group, be content with your wages.

Now that would go over well in a union hall, wouldn't it? But I'm not here to mock them, but to ask you, have you fixed your hope on that which is to be revealed in full? Or is a part of you fixed on Christ, and a part of you busy trying to lay up enough substance for the future? Isn't it grievous? These days we meet so many people who tell us they have built a big warehouse and they filled it with foodstuff, and they have gotten guns, and when the bad times come, which they're sure will be soon, they are planning to protect their own food supply, and if you come to them for help, they make it clear, get out of the way. If you won't leave, you'll get shot. Now does a Christian try to pile up goods on earth? I simply say you can't pile up goods on earth and in heaven.

You make up your mind. Where is your hope fixed? Is it truly fixed on the glorious salvation, or is it partially fixed? We've got to be serious. We've got to take these matters to our hearts.

Fix your hope completely. And I simply pause and ask, have you done so? But let's move to the fourth of these commands that are so clearly given in this passage. Verse 14.

As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lust, which were yours in your ignorance. Now we all, at some point in our lives, have been in the grip of lust. And there's no denying that.

And just in case there's a young person here that isn't quite clear as to what that means, I'll use harder words still for a moment. There is that which is ordinate and that which is inordinate. Now listen carefully.

God created us sexual beings. A lot of young people talk as if they had invented or discovered sex. Now that's not true.

God made us sexual beings. And he laid out the rules governing sex. So we have that which is ordinate, that which fits within the framework of what God has laid out.

Then we have that which is inordinate, that which goes outside the bounds that God himself has laid. A lust is an inordinate desire. Now you remember, don't you, that in 1 John 2, the apostle describes three things of very critical importance.

Let me take just a moment to read this, just so it is perfectly clear in your mind. This is 1 John 2. I read verses 15 and 16. Do not love the world, nor the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father, but from the world. So I have used the word ordinate and inordinate, and I have tried to make it clear.

God, the creator of sex, laid the guidelines and declared what is ordinate or acceptable, what is inordinate. Now in this passage in 1 John, all of us need to face, if we have not done so, that there are three great stages of temptation that come into our life. Very rarely have I met a young person who was in the full grip of the lust of the eye.

Most young people are grievously affected by the lust of the flesh. Now let me say again, a desire for a sexual relation in an ordinate fashion that is within the bounds of marriage was indeed put within us by God himself. But listen, there are these three stages.

Young people are hit hard by the lust of the flesh, the desire for some sexual experience. By the grace of God, some put reins on that desire and keep themselves for that person God gives them, for a married partner. But the bulk of the young people of our society go way beyond those bounds.

Now listen, if a person has not learned to bring the lust of the flesh under the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ, the second great wave of temptation can sweep over them, the lust of the eye. And often, some of you have seen precisely what I'm going to say. There's been some well-known minister perhaps whom you have listened to preach and you thought he was truly excellent.

Then you discover that indeed, although he is in middle age and maybe at the tail end of middle age, he's suddenly been caught in an adulterous situation and you exercise surprise. But in actual truth, if young people do not deal with that first wave, suppose Cain's problem had been purely sexual and God had said to him, sin is crouching at the door, its desire is toward you, you must master it. And Cain had cried out, Oh God, I know, help me.

But if you don't conquer the first wave of the lust of the flesh, you can move into mid-age where you're overwhelmed with the desire of goods, the lust of the eye, the desire to accumulate stuff, gold, silver, land, material goods. Now we have to have some of that. Some of that is ordinate.

The Bible does not speak against ordinate desire, but inordinate desire. And what a tragedy when a person who never dealt adequately with the lust of the eye and was still in the grip of the lust of the flesh and of the lust of the eye enters old age and if you're his grandchild, you know what I'm talking about. Who wants to listen to some old man bragging about his earlier life? And that's all some grandfathers do.

They're so full of their sexual conquest and their monetary conquest that they're a dreadful bore. But now this passage is warning us. Let me read again these precious words here in 1 Peter.

As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance. Hurry up your minds. Be truly sober in spirit.

Fix your hope completely and do not be drawn back into that which God himself has forbid. And let's again just pause for a moment and face the fact here we've had 12 glorious countenance lifters. How do we dare to allow what was once characteristic of our lives to again sweep back in and to cripple us and make it impossible for us to serve the Lord God almighty with any power whatsoever.

Finally number five verses 15 and 16. Like the Holy One who called you be holy yourselves also and all your behavior because it is written you shall be holy for I am holy. So we have here number one the standard.

That's the first statement. Like the Holy One who called you. And I simply want to press again this obvious truth.

You were not called to be saved from hell. You were called to be holy. And in case you've forgotten I remind you when poor Joseph was struggling with the issue of what to do about Mary after he discovered that the girl he intended to marry was pregnant.

The angel appeared to him and said do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. That which is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph you are to call the child Jesus for he shall save his people from their sin.

Not save them in their sin. Not save them despite their sin. But save them from their sin.

Be holy for I am holy. I don't personally know anything more tiring and more frustrating than trying to be good. Maybe somewhere along the line you said to yourself I have been striving for seven months now to be good.

I'm just going to take a day off trying to be good. It's not only hard it's impossible. And because of the difficulty of it some have invented a lot of nonsensical phraseology and invented experiences.

I don't know whether I shared with you ever an experience I had while a student in college in Spokane, Washington. I went into the college library one day to study and there was a group of about ten fellows gathered around the table. So I went off as far as I could because I didn't want to be disturbed.

But they were speaking with such enthusiasm and such loudness that I really couldn't focus on the work I had to do. Eventually I got up and walked over and stood behind the chairs of one of the fellows. And the fellow who was leading the discussion looked up.

He didn't know me. I didn't know him. He knew my name.

I knew his name. And he said, Roberts, did you have something you wanted to say? And I said, yeah. You see the conversation was about holiness.

And this man was claiming that he had had a holiness experience that eradicated his old nature. So he was perfect. All right, Roberts, do you have something you want to say? Yes.

So I say, do you know that Bible statement? Do all things in decency and in order preferring one another? Yes, I know that. What's that got to do with the conversation? And I said very kindly, why it is neither decent nor in order to carry on such an interesting conversation that nobody in the library can do their work. He leapt up from the table.

He had his Bible open. He slammed his Bible shut and he shouted, sounds just like a dirty Presbyterian. And he went raging out of the room.

Well, none of those fellows there after would have ever been convinced that he'd had his old nature eradicated. But it's nice to think there might be some method or some experience by which you enter

completely into holiness. But when this passage is calling us to be holy as he's holy, it's not preventing or presenting some shortcut or some quick fix experience.

But holiness is the standard. And all of us will be judged not on our standards, but on God's standards. So, let me kindly ask, is God's standard your standard? Or are you saying, oh, none of us is perfect, that's really too much to expect.

Be honest. God himself is holy. Jesus is described as the one who takes away sin.

It's not only the standard, but it's an absolute command. Be holy yourselves also. Verse 15.

It's not a suggestion, not the sort of a thing that says, oh, it would be awfully nice if a command. And the extent of the command is also made crystal clear. The end of verse 15, be holy also in all your behavior.

And again, in the light of those twelve countenance lifters, be honest. How seriously are you taking this command to holiness? And then the last verse of the portion we're looking at, verse 16, because it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And I just want to linger here for a moment and say to you, we're not talking about an impossibility.

God does not give us commands that are utterly impossible for human beings to meet. It may seem that way. As I already said, it is exhausting sometimes when we try to be holy, but it's not impossible.

Some of you will remember the words that were spoken to Abram way back in Genesis 17 at verse 1. I am God almighty. Walk before me blameless. Now, that could be taken as a threat.

Stand for a moment. Can you believe in your imagination that here stands Abram and God says to him, I am God almighty. Walk before me blameless.

And suppose he interprets that as a threat. I warn you. I'm God almighty.

I can finish you off. I can make your life impossible. I can beat you so low.

Nobody's ever been that low before. Look out. I'm telling you.

Be blameless. But better to see what it really is. Not a threat, but an absolutely wonderful truth.

What is absolutely impossible for us is very possible for him. What we cannot do, he can. And even more glorious, he will.

And he has already purchased holiness in the blood of Jesus Christ. We read about that earlier among those countenance lifters. I'm sure many of you have come to grips with this, but I fear some of you have yet to realize Jesus Christ is our holiness.

Oh, the wonderful words of 1 Corinthians 13.0. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom. That is righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

And what God is asking us tonight, what he's commanding us tonight, is to believe him. Christ not only died and was buried and rose again to justify, but to sanctify. And this set of five profoundly important commands are all possible for us through the power of the risen Christ.

And it's as we keep our eyes on him. Because our countenance is continually uplifted by constantly remembering what he has already accomplished and is accomplishing. It is through the power of Christ that truly we are able to keep these commands.

Imagine what would happen in this area of the country if everyone in the room tonight were to suddenly move into total obedience in these five commands. And why not?

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