

GETTING SERIOUS

1 PETER 1:13-21

I've been going to the gym lately to stay fit and keep off the weight. I'm in and out - 30 minutes on the treadmill, 20 minutes lifting light weights.

It's all business for me. I get in, get it over with, and get back home.

But there're other guys – young guys. I see them. They go to the gym for different reasons... to look cool – or be buff – or maybe meet a girl...

I've already got my girl... so what I do isn't so pretty...

I get my heart beat up, my face red, my hair wet, and my shirt soaked - then I go home. These young guys stay at the gym for two hours, without getting a hair out of place. Their shirt is still dry. They go to the gym, but I'm not sure how hard they work out - *and there's a difference...*

Likewise there's a difference between going to church, and getting in serious spiritual shape. Some folks come to church for the same reasons they go to the gym. It's cool to be *somewhat spiritual* – and have a buff-looking faith - maybe they're a guy looking for a Christian gal, or a gal looking for a Christian guy... Maybe that's why *you* come to church...

But how serious are you about following Jesus?

Once, a teenager wanted to buy a barbell and a set of weights. Some of his buddies were working out, and he thought a buff body would be cool.

His father wasn't opposed to the purchase, but he had his doubts about his son's determination and commitment to the rigors of weightlifting. The boy wanted the results, *but would he pay the price?* Despite the father's skepticism, the dad decided to help his son with the purchase.

As they shopped the father quizzed his son several times. "Are you sure you're going to stick with it?" "Weightlifting is hard work, son, are you certain this is what you want to do?" The boy was adamant. He was committed to lifting weights. He vowed to work out everyday.

Finally, they picked out a set of weights, and paid for them at the check out counter. The father walked off a few steps ahead of his son, when he heard him shout... *"You mean I have to carry them to the car!"*

Here was a boy excited about lifting weights and bulging muscles, but there's a difference between good intentions and commitment. The young man needed to ask himself *was he really serious about lifting weights?*

This is similar to the question Peter asks in 1:13-21 - *are we serious about being a follower of Jesus?* As in weightlifting, so it is in the Christian life, there's a difference between good intentions and follow through...

We see God's blessings and get excited. We covet bulging spiritual muscles – *but are we really willing to seriously work out our faith?*

This is how Peter begins, verse 13, **"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober..."** It's time to stop playing games and get serious!

In the world of Peter's day men wore long robes that extended to their ankles, and a leather belt around their waist. Of course, the robe was cumbersome and restrictive. It limited a person's range of motion.

Whenever it was time to do some strenuous work – either run, or lift, or jump, or climb – the man would roll up his robe and tuck it up under his belt. It was the equivalent of rolling up your shirtsleeves - or tightening your shoelaces – or buckling up your chinstrap...

You were ratcheting up your intensity – upping your efforts.

“Gird up the loins” meant getting serious about the task at hand.

Too many people are busy *playing at faith* - just dabbling in Christianity.

It's been said, *“The modern world works at its play, worships its work, and plays at its worship.”* We piddle half-heartedly at what's important.

Peter tells his readers it's time to get serious about living for Jesus. They need to beef up their determination, and kick their faith in gear...

Before I go further, let me make a clarification... Peter isn't saying the Christian life is a product of good works, or elbow grease, or will power.

Spiritual change, lasting peace, and a new nature entail a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Christian growth comes from the inside out – not from the outside in. It's *transformation* – not just *reformation*.

A changed life results from the seed of God's Word growing in a heart, fertile with faith and repentance. *But our determination does play a part.*

There's a quote I want to teach. It's a short saying, but it's long on truth.

Listen carefully... **"You cannot change your heart, but you can change your mind. God can change your heart, but He won't change your mind. But if you choose to change your mind, then God will change your heart."**

Let's repeat this together (**repeat**)... Now what does this mean?

This is profound. God's work waits on our cooperation. Your agreement with God is the key that allows Him to work changes in your heart and life.

God is a perfect gentleman. He won't barge in where He's not welcome. God won't change your mind if your mind is made up to resist Him.

We all start life hostile toward God. We're born with a proclivity to sin.

We're selfish and greedy from the womb... Jesus pointed this out when he made the sweeping statement, **"He who is not with Me is against Me."**

At some point in life you have to change your mind toward God.

When you show God you're willing and determined to obey Him, then He'll change your stubborn, and lustful, and

wayward heart. *Have you girded up your mind, and gotten serious about following Jesus?*

In this morning's text Peter tell us how to get serious about following Jesus. He gives us six new ways to think – six mind changes to make...

First, **live with the end in view.**

Second, **live with holiness as your goal.**

Third, **live with the Father in mind.**

Fourth, **live with the blood in the balance.**

Fifth, **live with God's purpose in sight.**

Sixth, **live with your hope in a risen Savior.**

Notice in verse 13 Peter says, **“Be sober and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”**

In short, as a Christian I need to live my life **with the end in view...**

I think it was Martin Luther who said, **“I live in light of two days... today and *that day*.”** He was speaking of the day Jesus returns for the Church.

One day we're going to see Jesus. And trust me it is the most important appointment on your busy calendar. You would be wise to prepare for that encounter. You'll want to hear Jesus say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant.”** Too many will hear, **“I never knew you, depart from Me...”**

Thomas Edison was an honest man who never spoke a word he didn't believe. On the night before he died his wife was by his bed. Suddenly, Thomas jerked up like he had

something to say. She leaned over her dying husband to hear him whisper, “It’s very beautiful over there.”

Indeed it is – *heaven is heavenly*. The beauty of heaven is what we need to remember when life gets ugly. No matter how rough life gets a Christian can always look forward to something infinitely better.

As Peter said in verse 6, in light of eternity, even a long life is but “for a little while.” The key to any race is to focus on the finish line. The beauties and pleasures of coming attractions make an unbearable world bearable.

Often it’s said of Christians, “They’re so heavenly minded that they’re no earthly good.” I suppose that’s possible. You could go off and sit on a mountain top, stare off into space, just waiting on Jesus to return.

But that’s an inadequate understanding of what eternity holds. Heaven is so important it doesn’t begin when you arrive. Preparation starts today. How you live and what you do today, shape how you’ll spend eternity.

CS Lewis wrote, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one.” A believer will get serious about following Jesus when he lives with heaven in mind.

In 1 John 3:3, the apostle was thinking of Jesus’ return when he wrote, “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

That's a nice way of saying you don't want Jesus to catch you with your pants down. Imagine, Jesus returning for you the same night you drink too much, or flirt with a secretary, or log on to a porn site. When Jesus comes back to snatch us up, you want to be found ready, and eager, and pure.

As I said last week the Christian life is seldom easy, but it's always worth it – and a primary consolation is what lies ahead. God offers us “[delayed gratification.](#)” Faithfulness today yields future blessings.

Yet this flies in the face of what makes the world go round. Folks today not only want it *all* – they want it *now*. *Instant everything* is the name of the game - *fast food - online shopping – internet bill pay - instant messaging...*

Walk a letter to the mailbox - raise the flag - it's delivered the next day - and we call it, “[snail mail](#)” – as if it got there via Pony Express.

If it we have to wait at all it's too late.

Yet if you carry this attitude to an extreme it will cause great frustration and disappointment in your relationship with God. You'll find an eternal God isn't that interested in “[instant gratification.](#)” Most of His blessings are time capsules that release their contents after they're swallowed.

As the Bible puts it, “[You seldom reap in the same season you sow.](#)” Nature and creation work off the principle of “[delayed gratification.](#)”

There's always an in between time – an *in the meantime*. There's a gap of time between the giving of God's promise

and its reception. One of the prerequisites of the Christian life is you've got develop some patience.

God says, endure through the night – and joy will come in the morning.

Paul wrote to Corinth, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...”

Imagine the hardships of Job – he lost it all. Family, fortune, friendships, and fitness – yet God called it “a light affliction.” Job’s plight sounds pretty heavy to me – yet God calls it “light” because He’s comparing it to “the eternal weight of glory” that’ll be enjoyed eventually by every believer.

Paul would tell us our first full second of heaven will be so exhilarating and breath-taking it’ll more than make up for ten lifetimes of suffering.

When you’re weary, or tempted, or doubtful, or discouraged – when you feel like *giving up*, or *giving in*, or *giving out*... Remember, “It is beautiful over there.” Peter writes in verse 13, “Rest your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...”

Grace is love we don’t deserve, and heaven is a chief example of God’s grace. Keep your sights on the grace you’ll receive when Jesus returns.

Once a pastor was teaching on heaven and the eternal pleasures and joys we’ll experience. He paused for a moment – and then he asked his congregation, “How many of you want to go to heaven raise your hand?”

Every hand shot up in the air - except the hand of one little boy. The pastor asked him, "Son, don't you want to go to heaven?" The little guy replied, "Yes sir, I just thought you were taking up a load right now."

And none of us know which load we're on.

You might be a young buck, but heaven could be a lot closer than you think. Whether you're young or old, live your life *with the end in view*.

But also live **with holiness as your goal**. Verse 14 tells us to live "as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." Pursue holiness.

There is nothing on earth – no landscape or seascape – no wonder of nature - no mountain, or river, or sunset - as beautiful as a holy life. The only thing that rivals the *beauties of heaven* is the *beauty of holiness*.

In 2 Chronicles 20:21 the people of God were appointed to "sing to the LORD... and praise the beauty of holiness..." In contrast, it's both tragic and sad that in our world today, "holiness" has become a dirty word.

The concept of holiness confuses lots of people...

Certain Christian sects have associated holiness with a strict list of dos and don'ts. Holiness is seen as obedience to a rigid system of legalism. Holy people dress a certain way - talk a certain way - act a certain way...

But holiness is simpler and more profound than *a list* or *a look*. It's an attitude. It means "to set apart." It's a life *reserved*

for God. Holiness is about loving God to the point that pleasing Him is my chief concern.

Think of a freshman girl with a crush on an older boy. She walks into the assembly... hoping, wishing... he'll sit beside her during the pep rally.

Several of her friends walk over to sit next to her, but she shoos them away. She's wants to keep the seat next to her open at all costs. It's reserved for someone special... *This is the attitude of holiness...*

Holiness saves a seat *in my life* for God... *in my mind – in my heart – in my sexuality – in my social life – in my activities – in my leisure time.*

Peter tells us in verse 14, “**not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance...**” I like Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this verse. He writes, “**Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then, you do now.**”

When Jesus has a seat at the table you watch what you're doing.

Your life is not just about you. Just because it feels good doesn't make it right. You know better. Serious Christians think in terms of holiness.

Verse 17 teaches us another way serious Christians think. “**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...**”

You get serious about faith when you live **with the Father in mind...**

You and your earthly dad may be friends. But a father isn't just a friend.

Over the course of a child's life he'll have lots of friends, but a father is more. He holds you accountable. He points you in the right direction. He holds sway over your life. He requires you to stick to your guns and do what you say. He can reward you or punish you. He wields authority.

And God is our father. Again I love Peterson's paraphrase of verse 17, "You call out to God for help and He helps – He's a good Father that way. But don't forget, He's also a responsible Father, and won't let you get by with sloppy living." Serious Christians remember, "*Who's my daddy?*"

They keep in mind that God is a Father who deserves to be loved, and appreciated, and respected, and feared. No "*sloppy living*" among God's kids. We need to live every day of our lives with our Father in mind...

Several years ago, Franklin Graham held an evangelistic crusade in Australia. One night a 15 year old responded to the invitation.

Later a counselor reported the conversation he had with the boy...

When the counselor asked him why he'd come forward and responded to the message, he replied, "**Because I haven't been decent to Jesus.**"

Our relationship with God is a personal relationship – *and in personal relationships people take things personally*. We have a Father in heaven who loves us – and love can be offended. You can trifle with God.

The fact that God is love - means He has feelings. You can hurt His feelings – you can upset His feelings. God gets mad, sad, and glad.

This is why throughout our stay on earth we need to live our lives with our Father in mind. Both *life below* and *life above* is a gift from Him.

Lou Little once coached football at Georgetown University. One year a boy tried out for his team who caught Lou's attention. He was big kid who worked hard, but he was more like a teddy bear than a defensive tackle.

In his four years on the team the only game action he saw was when Georgetown was up by 40 points, or down by 40 points. Lou kept him on the team because he was a good teammate and great for morale.

Coach Lou also noticed the tight relationship the boy had with his father. When dad visited, he'd hold the old man's arm, and escort him around.

When news came of his father's death, Lou went to console his player.

The coach told him if there was anything he could do... The boy asked for Lou's prayers - and then the young man dropped the bombshell... He did have one other request... He asked, **“Can I start my last game?”**

Lou didn't know how to reply. This last game was for the championship. This kid wasn't good enough to play, let alone start. Yet Lou was a man of his word. He agreed. He figured the boy would play one down and be done.

But to everyone's amazement the kid was awesome. He tackled a man in the backfield. He sacked the quarterback. He never exited the game.

Afterwards, Coach Lou approached the kid and asked him what had gotten into him. What motivated such an extraordinary performance?

That's when the young man still grieving over the loss of his dad, told Lou the rest of his story... **“Coach, my father was blind his whole life. And today, now that he's in heaven, is the first time he ever saw me play.”**

Our Father in heaven is watching us as well – and He's just as excited as the dad in the story to watch his children play. People who are serious about living out their faith and following Jesus keep the Father in mind.

Verse 18 gives us a fourth way to get serious about following Jesus.

Live your life **“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's telling us to understand the cross, and always live **with the blood of Jesus in the balance...**

Peter reminds us we were not redeemed with corruptible, tarnishable materials like gold and silver. If my soul had been bought by dollars, or euros, or pounds, or yen I would not feel the obligation that I do.

In fact, I'd probably try and pay off my debt on my own...

But my soul was purchased by a price I can never repay. God's designs on my life are so high and holy He allowed His only Son to go through a painful torture and execution. Like the lambs slaughtered by the priests, Jesus was *condemned to grant my pardon, and nailed to set me free.*

This week is Passion Week. We're having a Great Thursday and Good Friday service. We'll focus on the cross. And as *we survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died...* and consider how and why He died... it should pull us into a gravity of obligation we can't easily skirt.

His spilt blood means we're loved and valued. It means we have a God-given purpose - a divine destiny. It means that for reasons we'll never fully grasp God has a claim on our lives. He has ambitions for us...

We were bought at a price, and we are no longer our own.

In his book, "*The Reason for God,*" author Tim Keller writes of a woman he spoke to who was new to the concept of grace. All her life she'd tried to earn God's favor. Now she saw the beauty of grace – of freely receiving favor she could never earn - but she also saw its other edge...

She told Tim that she was scared by grace. He asked her why?

This new believer answered, “If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through.

I would be like a taxpayer with “rights” – I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by grace – then there’s nothing God can’t ask of me.” She’s right on!

Don’t misunderstand... Jesus didn’t do all He did for us in order to force us to do the same for Him. Grace isn’t a game of tit-for-tat.

My devotion to Jesus will never rival His devotion to me.

But can I receive grace and not be grateful? No! A deep sense of obligation is inevitable. This is why the NT calls us “love slaves.”

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross captures my heart and draws me into a relationship where no price is too great to show my love for Him.

The blood of Jesus ties to me to a shooting star that lifts me above the temptations of this world, and places me into a godly orbit.

I’m drawn forever by the wounds the Savior incurred for me...

When I live in light of the cross I realize I can never retreat to my former fleshly, immoral, prideful life. When I live with His blood in the balance I live differently. *In light of the cross how can we not get serious about Jesus?*

If you want to get serious about following Jesus **live with the end in view**, and **with holiness as your goal**, and **with the Father in mind**, and **with the blood in the balance**, and **with God's purposes in sight**.

Be a person of purpose. Know that your life has meaning and direction.

Evolution says you're just a chance arrangement of random molecules. Your life is of no more value than the algae growing in the retention pond.

But that's not what Peter says about us. Verse 20, **"(Jesus) indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you..."** Before the **"foundation of the world"** God knew you...

Before the planets were assigned orbits, God knew your eye color, and the swagger of your walk, and what would tickle your funny bone.

He also knew you'd rebel... you'd punk out... and give in... and dope up... and go off... He knew you'd cave in to temptation and flesh out...

God knew you'd deny Him and go your own way. He knew... Before the foundations of the world He chose to love you, and send Jesus for you...

Before time began God ordained for Jesus to die in your place...

Understand your salvation and position in Christ is no accident. God's interest in you is not a freakish thing. It's not impulsive, or Johnny-come-lately. God made preparations for

you to be saved long before He hung the sun and stars in the heavens, and brought the moon out at night.

How can you forget about Him by tomorrow morning's coffee break?

Serious Christians understand their life has a God-sanctioned purpose, and they muster all their energy to live **with God's purposes in sight...**

Finally verse 21, **"who through (Jesus) (we) believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."** You get serious about following Jesus when you live **with your hope in a risen Savior...** The resurrection is all about hope!

As we learned last Sunday night the resurrection was not the end of anything. It was the beginning. It would require more faith not less.

I love the last scene in the 1977 miniseries, **"Jesus of Nazareth."**

The political Jew who conspired with Judas - who did all the dirty work - enters the empty tomb and discovers that the Man he helped crucify has risen from the dead. He holds the shroud, gazes off into the distance, and whispers to himself... **"Now it begins, now it all begins..."**

The empty tomb proved conclusively that Jesus was alive and well. Even today, He's out there, somewhere, doing what pleases Him.

The fact Jesus rose from the dead and lives today infuses hope into all of life's challenges. If Jesus desires He can hold

back the tide, or come to my rescue, or change the course of my unchangeable circumstances.

Nothing is impossible for a risen Savior.

Hitch your wagon to the risen Lord Jesus and He'll take you places.

Your life will become an adventure. You'll see, and do, and hear, and learn of things godly men of old only dreamed of knowing. Get serious about following Jesus, and you'll live *with hope in a risen Savior*.

As I said earlier, there's a difference between frequenting the gym and working out – just like going to church is not necessarily living for Jesus.

If you want to be a serious Christian... then live **with the end in view...** and **with holiness as your goal...** and **with the Father in mind...** and **with the blood in the balance...** and **with God's purposes in sight...** and **with your hope in a risen Savior...** It's time for some of us to *get serious!*