

1 PETER 1:13-2:3
THE STORY OF OUR PREPARATION

I am not a big cereal box reader, but one day recently, I spied a box of Honey Nut Cheerios. Spread across the front of the box, over the picture of the beautiful bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios, was this banner: “Great Taste Makes Lowering Cholesterol a NON-CHALLENGE.”

How silly is this? First, taste has nothing to do with lowering cholesterol. Second, even if you eat lots of Honey Nut Cheerios, I doubt they will do much to lower your cholesterol. But silliest of all - what in the world is a “Non-Challenge”? It must be something that is easy. Just eat your Honey Nut Cheerios, and lowering cholesterol will be no challenge. If you have ever tried to lower your cholesterol, you know how silly this is.

Do you know what else is silly? It is the idea that living for Jesus will be a “non-challenge.” Sadly, some sell the Christian life that way. “Just come to Jesus, and all your troubles will be gone. Life will be a non-challenge.” Peter would laugh (or cry) at this. We are using his words to discover our mission in the fourth scene of the story of our God, our world and our lives. Last week, we learned how we may rejoice in God’s past, present and future grace as we live out this mission. Now, instead of encouraging his readers to enjoy a bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios, Peter begins the next section of his letter with these words: “Therefore, prepare...”

The word here describes how people with long robes would pull the robes between their legs, then wrap and tie them around their waist, so they could do strenuous exercise or hard work. Even in the joy of God’s grace, living a missional life for Jesus will be challenging. So we start today where we finished last week: Are you ready? This readiness is not just a one-time activity, but an ongoing preparation for whatever God calls us to say and do, as we live for Jesus each day. Peter’s words here drive us to three challenging questions.

First, **WHERE IS YOUR MIND?** As we think, so we do. Peter’s words challenge us about what we keep out of our minds, and what we take into our minds.

Peter starts with *WHAT YOU KEEP OUT*. We read in verse 13, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled...” The idea here is of sobriety in spirit. This does not mean you are gloomy. It means you strive to keep your mind clear, so you can resist the “evil desires” Peter mentions in verse 14. Then in the following verses, Peter reminds us of several important truths. Just like last week, they teach us about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

* The holiness of the Father: “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.’ Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” You do not worry over the condemnation of God, for Jesus has borne your sins on the cross. But you do wonder how you may serve this holy Father, whom you revere and worship with your lips and your life.

* The redemption of the Son: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect...” This is the good news of the gospel that calls you to faith in Jesus, and a life lived for Jesus.

* The preaching of the Spirit: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.” You have been given new life, and you are guided in this new life by the glorious word of God.

Do you see what Peter is saying? There is a competition for your mind. You have these great truths about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and you have all these evil desires within you and around you. The battle will be fought on the soil of your mind, and much of that battle will involve keeping out whatever

will crowd out those great truths.

I have said this before, and I will say it again: if I could use one word to describe the average believer in Jesus Christ in this culture, it is distracted - and it starts with the mind. We clutter our minds with corrupting clamor, and we act as if it will not affect us. Someone recently told me about hearing that only one in three Christian men regularly read their Bibles. My first response was to think, "But 3 of 3 Christian men regularly see ESPN, or Fox News, or CNN, or whatever else they feel they must see." And it is not just men.

Why are we so distracted? Why are our minds so filled with rot? Why is our Christian living and mission so lethargic? In the words of Philippians 4:8, could it be because the false crowds out the true, the foolish crowds out the noble, the wrong crowds out the right, the corrupt crowds out the pure, the ugly crowds out the lovely, and the damnable crowds out the admirable?

The question of the mind includes what you keep out, and *WHAT YOU TAKE IN*. After Peter says you have been born of the "imperishable word of God," he declares that if you are preparing your mind for the action of mission for Jesus, you must "crave pure spiritual milk." Like a newborn baby seeking the nourishment of a breast or a bottle, you will long for the milk of God's truth. You will crave it enough to prioritize reading it, praying over it, and meditating on it. You will hunger for it enough to pursue faithful preaching, satisfying teaching, and genuine fellowship. You will long for pure, spiritual milk.

Where is your mind? Your life will reflect what you have kept out of it, and what you have taken into it. As I mentioned recently in our e-newsletter, God has had to challenge me about this again. I am tempted to constantly immerse myself in the clutter and cynicism of my culture, but I must consistently marinate my spirit in the gospel truths I claim to love.

What fills my ears as I drive around town? What meets my eyes as I stare at my TV? What shapes my thinking as I bounce around on the Internet? I think of the questions from Tim Keller that I mentioned a couple of weeks ago - questions about the false "gods" we serve. What do I daydream about? What are my nightmares about? When my mind is free to wander to fantasy or fear, where is it? Surely the answer reflects what I have kept out, and what I have taken in.

Where is your mind? Are you making it ready for mission in Jesus' name?

Now a second question: **WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?** Let's learn a little more Greek! Last week, we learned "hina," which means "so that" - a word that reveals God's purposes for us. Today, let's discover a word in verse 15: "anastrophe." It is translated, "in all you do." It refers to the big picture of how we live our lives. Peter uses this word often, because he knows our everyday life is central to this mission. So this question asks, "What is your life all about? How do you approach the way you live each day?"

Peter starts with this: *YOU WANT TO BE THE SAME*. He writes in verse 14, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." When you conform to someone or something, you fashion yourself after that person or thing. We see this most with people. You shape your appearance the same way - with your dress or your hair. You might start to talk the same way, and act the same way.

Yet this is also true of habits we cannot easily see. You may conform to your culture's evil desires. You may live filled with pride. You may treat people as objects to be manipulated and dominated. You may pursue a greedy and wasteful lifestyle. You may live for yourself, and emotionally destroy the people closest to you. You may despise anyone who is not like you.

We often talk about this with teenagers. We discuss peer pressure, and we lament how our teens are so tempted to be like the teens around them. This is true, but this is not just true of them. Whether or not we are aware of it, we are all pressured to conform - to be the same. Consciously and unconsciously, we conform to the way of life of the people around us. In a world of sin and sinners, that conformity is often to evil desires.

You want to be the same. But Peter's words declare, *YOU MUST BE DIFFERENT*. We read in verses 15 and 16: "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.'" The Father who has chosen you to be redeemed for obedience to the Son, and who has brought the

gospel to you through the preaching of the Spirit, calls you to his holiness.

When we say “holy,” we are talking about godly purity. God declares and describes what is right and what is wrong, and we strive to follow his pure standards in our lives. In a world of sin and sinners, such purity is distinct. It is not the way the world lives. Holiness will be strange. Holiness will seem weird. But that is the call of the pure God to his purified people.

You want to be the same, but you must be different. Sometimes, believers have urged other believers to “sameness.” They say, “You need to show people that you are just like them.” Yes, we need to show people that we are sinful people in need of grace - just like them. But as well, the Bible calls God’s people to live clearly and even radically distinct lives.

I think of the book “UnChristian,” which we discussed in Sunday School a couple of years ago. The core issue in the book is what non-Christians think of professing Christians. The authors said for every 10 non-Christians, 8 or 9 know at least one Christian. But of those non-Christians who know non-Christians, only about 1 in 10 see the lifestyles of Christians as any different than their lifestyles. That lack of a difference leads them to wonder why anyone would bother with Christianity.

Same or different? This is not a call to a “holier-than-thou” attitude, where we proudly parade our righteousness, with our noses upturned to anyone who is not just like us. This is a call to a humble holiness - a life that admits sin, but a lifestyle that also aspires to reflect the holy goodness of our God.

For example, let’s think about your life in your workplace or school - the place of your daily calling. You are surrounded by people who do not name Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Some are hostile, and some could not care less. Does the Bible call you to demonstrate how much you can be like them, or does the Bible call you to live a distinctly holy life before them?

Think about that. The way you answer that, will influence everything about the way you live there. Peter says, “Be holy.” He does not say, “Be isolated and proud.” He does not say, “Be nosy and preachy.” He does not say, “Be snotty and snooty.” But he does say, “Be holy.”

What does this look like? Negatively, you will not join in what is wrong. At times, you must say, “My God and my conscience will not permit me to join you in this.” Positively, you will work hard and well, even when others are lazy and sloppy. You will strive to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all the rest - when others want to hassle and harm others. When you are wrong, you will admit it - and you will strive to do better, for the glory of your holy Savior. You are showing Jesus, by showing how Jesus changes everything in your life.

What is your life? Is it the same life as the life of the people who follow evil desires in their ignorance? Or is it the godly, distinct, holy life of the follower of Jesus?

Where is your mind? What is your life? Then a third question: **HOW IS YOUR HEART?** Near the end of this section, Peter calls his readers to fulfill this mission by casting off hate and chasing after love, as they live with each other.

Now you might say, “Wait a minute, pastor. These words are supposed to be about mission. How does that involve hate and love within the body of believers in the church?” My answer is that Jesus thought our love for each other was central to this mission. That is why he said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

How is your heart? First, Peter’s hope is that *YOU ARE CASTING OFF HATE*. He writes in the first verse of chapter 2, “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” This is a catalogue of hate. We like to believe we are so loving, but how often are we hypocrites? We think hatefully, we wish hatefully, we speak hatefully, and we act hatefully. We say we love God, but then we hate each other. Is it any wonder that people wonder whether we know God at all?

When a church splits over a personal feud or a petty issue, what is a non-Christian to think? When a man leaves his wife and children for someone young and exciting, what is a non-Christian to think? When a woman steals from the hard-earned and heartfelt gifts of God’s people, what is a non-Christian to think? When

a believer slanders the pastor, the elders, or that irritating woman, what is a non-Christian to think? Why join the hatred? I can get that anywhere.

How is your heart? Peter's first hope is that you are casting off hate. Then Peter urges you to this: *YOU ARE CHASING AFTER LOVE*. Look back at chapter 1, verse 22: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." This is not fake love, but sincere love. This is not stagnant love, but a deepening love. This is the beautiful picture of God's people growing in demonstrating the love that they have been shown. This a mission of the heart and the heart of the mission. But what does this look like in our lives? I offer two examples:

* The example of forgiveness and reconciliation. Do you ever notice that people love to hear stories like this? A broken marriage is restored. Wartime enemies become friends. The prisoner is forgiven by the victim. The estranged parent and child are reunited. You do not have to be a Christian to be moved by such stories, because the longing for forgiveness and reconciliation resides deep in the human heart. When believers in Jesus cast off hate and chase after love by forgiving and reconciling, it is a powerful testimony to the gospel we believe.

* The example of generosity and service. This is especially true in seasons of crisis. I cannot count the times over the years, when our congregation has rallied around a person in need, and non-Christian family and friends have been amazed at the love God's people have shown for each other. When God's people love each other with generosity and service, it is a victory in the mission of declaring and demonstrating Jesus to those who do not know him. When we give and serve as Jesus gave and served for us, we testify to his great gift and his great service.

How is your heart? How are our hearts? Our hate for each other will obstruct this mission, and our love for each other will promote this mission. People see the love of God, when they see God's people loving each other. Is that what they see in your life, and in our life together?

Where is your mind? What is your life? How is your heart? Do those sound like "non-challenging" questions? Hardly! In fact, maybe they sound like nothing more than discouraging questions. That is why we have to remember Peter's words at the end of verse 13: "Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." Just when we think the challenge is too great, Peter reminds us of the greatness of the grace that he has already revealed.

Always remember this and never forget this: this fourth scene is not really our mission at all. It is God's mission - in us and through us. Because of this, we rejoice in the past, present and future grace of God. He is calling his chosen people to himself. He challenges us with questions like this, but he also comforts us with the promise of his past, present and future grace.

I am not up to lowering my cholesterol. No matter how many Honey Nut Cheerios I eat, that is not a "non-challenge." On my own, I am not able to do the mission God has given to me. My mind is too distracted. My life is too conforming. My heart is too hateful. But in the grace of God, I have answers for these questions, and I have grace for these challenges. Will you, will I, will we, by that grace, daily strive to prepare our minds, our lives, and our hearts for this mission?