

April 6, 2008
Easter 3

“Resurrection People Are Different”

1 PETER 1:17-21

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

It was in the spring of the year, usually about March or April that my father would order little chicks to replace the old hens and to provide tasty range fed spring chickens for the family and relatives. It was our job as kids to watch the little chicks to be sure that they did not start pecking at each other. That happened when one little chick had a spot on it that would make it different. The other chicks pecked at the spot, and they kept pecking at it until it started bleeding. It was our job to separate that little chick from the others to keep it from being pecked to death.

Does this happen with people? Sure it does. These words of Peter were written to Christians who were so different from the rest of people in the Roman world, so different that they became targets of persecution when bad things happened. Some historians have said the wicked emperor Nero blamed the great fire in Rome on the Christians which then ignited a wave of persecution. Peter writes to dear Christians who were strangers to this world and suffering all kinds of trials for their faith.

My dear Christians people, you are radically different from other people who live around you in your community because you are resurrection people. The resurrection has changed your life. You now believe with all your heart that Jesus is Lord and God. You believe that Jesus kept the nail prints in his hands of Jesus as living proof that you have peace with God and your sins are forgiven through his blood. You believe that someday Jesus will raise your body from the dead. That makes you different from people who believe in reincarnation or the transmigration of the soul. You are different because your morals and convictions are shaped by a love for your risen Lord and Savior. This morning we want to take a closer look at these words just read to you to discover just how different we are as resurrection people.

Resurrection people know what the Lord expects of them

Resurrection people have a keen and sharp understanding of what the Lord expects of them. Peter writes, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." Because you are resurrection people you know that God will not be impartial when he judges people. He will judge everyone on the basis of his standard of perfection and holiness. In the previous verse Peter wrote, "But

just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all that you do, for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.' Resurrection people fear God, they respect him and they respect his Word that tells them how to live our lives.

You just don't show this respect for God's ways when you come to worship on Sunday morning, wearing little "post its" of respect for God that you take off when you leave this worship service. You have this awe and respect during the week even when you are around people who are not Christian. You have this respect of God in the privacy of your room when you turn on the computer or watch television or drive down the freeway, or put the ear plugs into your head and listen to songs. God knows everything we do, everything we think, even everything we fail to do. We live our lives according his standards of perfection.

How differently you will live your life each day, if you can remember at all times that you are being judged primarily not by people, not by your feelings and intuitions, but by what your heavenly Father thinks of you. Psalm 139 says, "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down." Then the psalmist David prays, "Search me O God and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." That's a prayer to be different. We answer first to our heavenly Father, before we are concerned about what others think, or what our gut feelings might tell us.

Peter tells us that we live our lives in reverent fear. Let me illustrate this by showing you this circular saw. When you operate a power tool such as this, you need to show it respect. You certainly don't want to use it carelessly or it can kick back, and it may even cut a finger, or an arm or a leg. If the tool is used correctly, then it can make cutting boards or a piece of plywood a much easier task. God's ways are always the best ways for us to live. As resurrection people our fear and love for God is so great that we respect every part of God's commandments. We do not follow the world around us that cuts corners with God or sings songs such as "I'll do it my way." The world puts tremendous pressure on us to change the rules and make them fit our lives or the times in which we live. That is why Paul tells us in Romans 1, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, for their foolish hearts were darkened."

About ten years ago I was walking through the airport in Las Vegas to the United Terminal. You need to take a very long escalator to a lower level. On the other side where the escalator was going up, there must have been about 20 orthodox Jews with black pants, black coats, black hats and black beards coming up the other escalator. They stood out as different from the glamour and glitz that is even found in the airport at Las Vegas. You are even more different because you are keenly aware of what your Father expects of you.

What makes you even more different as resurrection people is that you believe you are saved, not by anything you do, but purely and completely by the blood of Jesus that provided the perfect ransom payment for sin. If I cut myself with a knife I will bleed. Touch any part of a resurrection person's life and they will bleed with faith and trust in Jesus as the source of their salvation.

Resurrection people know they are redeemed by Jesus' blood

Listen again to how Peter describes your precious faith in the blood of Jesus as the source of your salvation. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and 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." Because you have seen the risen Lord with eyes of faith you are people who are truly blessed. You have seen the nail marks in his hands and know that it was not through material things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed or rescued or ransomed.

The ancient Egyptians buried their dead with gold to help them in the next life. Money buys you food, pays your rent, puts gas into your car and provides for clothes and shoes, but it cannot pay for one small sin I committed ten years ago. It is not just money that fails to make the adequate ransom payment. I cannot use the good deeds of another person or some great Christian from the past to pay off my debt of sin. Nor can I use the good life I try to live to make the ransom payment. Nothing works except the blood of Jesus, the blood of God himself that was offered as a lamb without blemish or defect. The Revelation says this about resurrection people who will someday stand around the throne of the Lamb with palm branches in their hands. "These are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." You are so different that if someone gave you a whole treasure chest filled with gold, you would immediately worry that such a gift might take your eyes off of Jesus as the source of your forgiveness and peace with God.

You are so different as Peter says, "You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers." What an indictment this is of all religions of the world and the false religious beliefs with which you and I were born. Ephesians 2 tells us we were once dead in our trespasses and sin, following the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. What has kept you from strapping bombs on your body and blowing yourself up with the hope of getting to the highest levels of Allah's paradise? What has kept you from being a person here in this neighborhood next to our church, who believes sincerely that the more rent you pay here now, the greater your mansion will be in the next life? Only one thing has changed you and made you different. It is the resurrection of Jesus that has convinced you that Jesus really is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Peter reminds us that his ransom payment of Jesus was planned for us before the foundation of the world. "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed to us in these last times for your sake." Have you ever gone into surgery and had the doctor carefully explain to you what is going to be done to your body? That gives you confidence that the job will be done well. The plan for Jesus' blood to be shed on the cross was carefully designed from all eternity. You are so full of joy over what Jesus has done for you, that the people around you scratch their head and wonder to themselves, "What kind of people are these anyway?"

Resurrection people know the full glory that is theirs

There is something else that makes you very different from people around you? You have this hope that someday your body will be raised to life again on the last day. I heard someone say recently that a sixteen year old boy thinks about death every five minutes. If that is true, then how amazing that we can say to each other this morning, "I know what will happen to me after I die." Peter speaks of this hope of glory. "Through him you

believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so you faith and hope are in God." Because of Jesus resurrection we live our lives in hope, hope that tomorrow is another day to live under Jesus unfailing love, and hope that someday we see Jesus face to face in all of his glory.

The night before he died Jesus prayed that his disciples might see his glory. "Father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Ask someone if they are going to heaven when they die, and the typical response is, "I hope so." This is not the hope that we have as resurrection people. Our hope is based on the Jesus resurrection and the glory he has promised us. So strange and so different are you that you sincerely believe and long for Jesus to return this week because you know where you are going. Nothing would bring you greater joy than seeing the clouds open up and Jesus coming in glory to take you home. We live with that hope and it makes our problems small by comparison. We are resurrection people and that makes us different. Amen.