**Always Prepared To**

**Defend Your Hope**

**1 Peter 3:8-15**

Trinity V – July 12, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, what is your hope? Some of you are hoping that COVID-19 will just end. Some are hoping for at least a 60 game MLB season. Some are hoping there will be a NFL season, and further hoping that the Packers have cleaned up their problems and will go to the Super Bowl.

Some of you are hoping that I will make a decision soon – and of those hoping this, some are hoping I will stay and some are hoping I will leave.

I hope to have opportunity to get fishing with my sons. I also hope that the salmon run and bite is better this year than last year.

These are nice hopes, but is that our true hope? What is the hope which Peter expressed in our text, the hope we should always be prepared to defend? *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*

Your hope as a Christian is Christ. Your Christian hope is reflected in your beliefs. Those beliefs should touch every single area of your life. Unfortunately, much of what you believe is constantly under attack. Turn on the TV and flip through the channels and you will see the teaching of the faith, your very hope, being undermined at every turn.

For example, it is amazing in how many different places the teachings of an old earth crop up, and not just on PBS, the Discovery Channel, or Animal Planet (since we went to antenna only, we do not know what is on those anymore). Everyday TV shows that have nothing to do with animals, or geology, or biology – even some sitcoms – will mention something as being millions, or even billions of years old. And it really is all so tempting.

We are tempted to ask, “Does it really matter if we believe the earth is millions of years old or only about nine thousand years old? Isn’t it OK to believe in millions of years, and that we are evolved from lower life forms? Can’t we blend what the Bible says, and also believe in an old earth. Couldn’t God have used millions of years, after all, it says in the Bible that to God a thousand years are like but a day? So, couldn’t the days of creation have been millions of years?”

Can you defend the truth of your hope, that what you believe about the beginning of all things really does matter? I would ask you to consider this. If the days of creation were actually millions of years, and if God used evolution to bring man into existence, does that create a problem at all?

Please bear with me here. I would say that there is a serious problem, in fact, an insurmountable problem! If God used evolution, and the days of creation were millions of years long, that would mean that animals lived ***and died*** before man came on the scene. Do you understand the significance of that statement, that animals lived ***and died***? If such is the case, then what do we do with what the Scriptures say took place on the sixth day? *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.* (Gen. 1:31)

God declared each day to be “good,” and on after all was done, He called creation, “very good.” If God used millions of years, and the appearance of life happened according to evolutionary theory, and God used the evolutionary process to create, and the end of that process happened on the sixth day – AND God made His proclamation at that time, millions of years (but only six God-days), then death is part of God’s plan, and God said that death is “very good.”

Bear with me here and follow along. If death is very good, then it is not a result of sin. If that is true, then the first animal that died, did not give up it’s life to cover Adam and Eve’s sin, it died because it was part of the plan. If that is all true, then why would Jesus need to come and redeem us from death? If death is part of God’s plan, and Jesus didn’t really need to die and rise again, is there really a resurrection? Is any of the Gospel of Jesus really true? Is there really a heaven? Is there life eternal?

If you believe in evolution, where is your hope as a Christian?

So, is it important to be able to defend your hope and stand firm in defense of your faith – even on the issue of an old earth and macro evolution? As you can see, even evolution has to do with your hope of salvation and Jesus! Are you always prepared to defend your hope?

COVID-19 has to do with your hope as a Christian. How we approach this will be a reflection of our hope. I am not suggesting foolishness in our actions, nor am I suggesting that we tune out completely the medical suggestions that are being made. However, if I were to contract the disease and death looks imminent – how do I respond and live out my last few days?

These are just a couple things.

Look at some issues in today’s world. How do we treat our neighbor, all those created – like us – in the image of God? What do we think about them? How to we relate to them? For them Christ also died!

What about the things in our world which Scripture proclaims are sinful? According to God’s Word we are all born in sinfulness. There are no worse sins, some might be a bit more obvious as we live out our lives. Are we prepared to defend our hope?

Can we call people to repentance, so that they might share in the same hope we have, that in Christ there is forgiveness and life?

All those caught in sin need to hear that God wants them to repent and receive the very same forgiveness which gives us hope. Some of them have hearts that are in turmoil over what they have done. Some think they are not sinning. Some others think they are unforgivable. We need to bring the word of Christ to them, that they may know that Christ died also for their particular sin, and that they might have hope.

Are you always prepared to defend your hope? Are you always prepared, for you may be the only hope they have of hearing of hope of salvation in Christ.

We need to be careful though, lest we lead people to think that we believe that somehow we are better at keeping God’s Law than them. The Law always accuses – and in truth, it fully accuses us as well.

When considering God’s Word, and the issues we see in the world that can be addressed by it, we have been woefully silent all too many times.

I know, I heard it again just the other day, “there’s two things you never discuss politics and…” Yes, you know the next word – religion.

We can argue about which football team of the past was the best ever. Who is the G.O.A.T. in the history of NBA. We can even argue what the best lure for walleye might be.

But heaven forbid we discuss religion, someone might get upset and we don’t want an argument, especially in the family. What did Jesus say? “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” (Matt. 10:37-38)

We might make enemies or upset family members if we talk about what many consider delicate subjects. But if we saw our neighbor standing in the road oblivious to the truck coming, we would not hesitate to push them out of the way or holler out a warning.

Why then, when we know eternal death is possibly approaching, won’t we holler out a warning? Are you always prepared to defend your hope? Are you ready at all times to speak a word calling others to the same repentance in which you daily immerse yourself, trusting in the forgiveness that was purchased by Christ?

Dearly beloved of God, our hope is not about the law. Our hope is not based upon the fact that we have kept the Law well enough for God. If my hope were to rest upon what I have done according to the Law, I would have no hope, only fear! In fact, when it comes to always defending my hope, well, chalk that up to another area of my sinfulness. I have walked away from conversations because I just didn’t want to get into it. In my fear of a disagreement, I kept m mouth shut. In so doing, I did not defend my hope. When this happened I failed to trust that the Holy Spirit might guide my words, and work through them to lead others to repentance. too often, I have remained sinfully silent.

I must constantly remember that my hope is not built upon Todd Randall Jerabek, or how well I may have kept God’s commands – I am a failure – a poor, miserable sinner. My hope is built on something more sure, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. Christian hope is not some, “well, I hope so, but I’m not sure.” Our hope is confident, it is what we know to be true and is ours – we just have yet to see it fully realized – it is a hope.

Jesus spoke to defend truth at all times. He did not always make friends. His own family thought that He was crazy and did not understand Him. This perfection, even in the face of ridicule, He sacrificed to pay for your sinfulness and mine.

He is my hope, for He has taken my failings into His own flesh. My sinful unwillingness to speak out boldly in defense of the faith, He has taken to the cross in my stead.

My hope – my confidence – is that Jesus Christ took my sins from me and grants to me His life and resurrection. In the forgiveness He purchased and delivers to me, I have nothing to fear. I know that although I may deserve God’s wrath and punishment, in Christ Jesus, I receive forgiveness and life.

My hope is confident and sure. I know that today the forgiveness I heard spoken into my ears has indeed removed my sin.

My hope is confident and sure. I know that I eat of Christ’s very body pierced to purchase Me as His own child, and I drink of His holy and precious blood, shed to cleanse me from my sin. I know that in the eating and drinking, not only do I receive forgiveness, life, and salvation – but that my faith will be strengthened so that I might always be ready defend this hope.

This is not only my hope, but yours as well!

Today you and I am being prepared and strengthened by Christ Himself so that we may always defend our hope – hope of the forgiveness and life that is our in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.