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1 Peter 1:13-21

Fourth Message

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# THREE DANGERS AT SEA

*SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND*

I have several consuming passions in life, and one of them is a love of the sea. My Welsh surname, Morgan, even means “born by the sea.” Growing up in Southern California I took every opportunity to spend time sailing. One of my favorite memories is the time I sailed in a 44-foot ketch from Catalina to San Pedro. The ketch had an extra large Genoa sail, larger even than a mainsail, which took so much wind the boat almost keeled over. But while my buddies were holding on in the stern with their stomachs heaving, I was standing in the bow, my heart surging in excitement and anticipation of a great sail. To me, the sea has always been a place of vision where I sensed restlessness and a hunger for places beyond.

A study of the sea in the Scriptures is fascinating. In the Ancient Near East, the sea was greatly feared. To the Jews, it symbolized the unbelieving Gentile world, a world characterized by darkness, restlessness and disorder. The Jews were not a sea-loving people. The land was their first love; they never ventured forth very much. But Isaiah had a vision of a Servant who would come and bring justice to the nations. At that time, Isaiah prophesied, “the coastlands would wait expectantly for Thy law” (Isa 42:4).

When Jesus, the Servant, came, he had many dealings on the sea and by the sea with Peter, the author of our study. Peter was called to Christ on the sea. He was with Jesus during a severe storm on the sea. He shared the miracle of the enormous catch of fish from the sea. He paid his taxes at Jesus’ direction with a coin he took from a fish. He was ordained by the sea. And after Pentecost, at Joppa, by the seacoast, Peter had that life-changing vision which revealed that the Gentiles would be fellow-heirs with the Jews in the Kingdom of God.

Two thousand years later we can safely say that we are living in an age when God is bringing the whole sea, the whole Gentile world, under his dominion. As believers, we are to live like sailors who venture forth into dangerous and uncharted waters, bringing the sea under Christ’s dominion.

As I was studying our text for this morning from Peter’s first letter, I was struck with how well it fit the metaphor of sailing. The sea is a dangerous place. Our text today, however, reads like a manual written to protect us from storms at sea as we go forth with the gospel of Christ. Peter lists three dangers we will face, and he gives three antidotes to protect us in the midst of life’s storms. Verses 1 through 12 of chapter 1 set out the great salvation, future, present, and past, that Jesus Christ has accomplished for us.

Beginning in verse 13, Peter details what our response should be.

## I. Lost Horizon (1:13)

**Therefore, girding the loins of your mind, keeping sober, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (NASB)**

### A. The Command: Keep A Long-Range Focus

When we face suffering, when we are battered by affliction, we are tempted to forget our bearings. We forget where we are headed and lose our way. We become lost at sea! We respond by reacting to whatever hits us, losing our original purpose and direction. Discouragement strikes, and the flesh begins to assert itself, especially when all of our imperfections come to the surface.

Peter’s antidote to this temptation is given us in this verse: We must keep a long-range focus. Sailors in the ancient world used a sextant to fix their course. The stars on the horizon were their guide, so no matter what the weather conditions they could keep their bearings—where they were, and where they were headed. Peter, the fisherman, uses the same word: “fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” If you fix your hope on this present life, however, you will certainly be disappointed.

But one day yet future we will be vindicated. One day we will be a perfectly holy people, on the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is the day on which we should fix our hope. If we look to any other horizon or source, however promising or hopeful it may seem for the moment, we will be disappointed. When you take driver’s education, the instructor always says, “Aim high in your steering.” Don’t look at the hood of your car, but aim high. This is what the apostle is saying.

In order to maintain this long-range focus, however, two prerequisites are necessary.

### B. Prerequisite #1: A Clear Mind, Ready for Action

“...having girded the loins of the mind.” Here is our first prerequisite, says Peter: We must “gird the loins of our mind.” Today we would use the expression “rolling up our sleeves.” Here is what Charles Bigg says about this word picture:

The verb is used of gathering or tucking up long skirts by means of a belt so as to be ready for energetic action. Peter may be thinking of our Lord’s words, “Be dressed in readiness, and your lamps alight...” (Luke 12:35,46). Luke may also have in mind the imagery from the Exodus for the same word is used there... “eat it with your loins girded” (Ex. 12:11). It recalls “unto obedience” (v.2). Those who have loins girded are ready for instant obedience and are ready to move out on their journey of faith.

When a storm arises at sea, all deck hands must have clear minds ready for action. There must be an instantaneous response to the Captain’s orders, for the lives of all on board depend on it. Believers must keep their minds prepared and focused to receive orders from our Lord, no matter what their feelings are.

Notice that there is no word about feelings here. If you are caught in a storm, your feelings are the last thing you will want to consult. Obedience is what will bring you safely through the storms of life. Keep your eyes on the Captain. As the psalmist says,

To Thee I lift up my eyes,  
 O Thou who art enthroned in the heavens!  
 Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,  
 As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress;  
 So our eyes look to the Lord our God,  
 Until He shall be gracious to us. (Ps 123:1-2)

“...having girded the loins of the mind.” We must be ready to obey instantly.

### C. Prerequisite #2: Maintaining Clear Thinking

“...keeping sober.” The idea here is soberness of thinking. When one is drunk, one cannot react quickly and decisively. We all know what happens when a captain of a ship drinks, sets his course, and goes to sleep. This is what the captain of the Exxon Valdez did on Good Friday this year, and his actions destroyed the State of Alaska. I was in Alaska one month after this happened and I saw for myself the tragic aftermath of one man’s drunkenness. Alaskans are land-loving people. They don’t live for their homes or their cars. They love their land. They consider their state the most beautiful vacation land in the country. But now their spirit is broken. Many have lost their jobs. One man’s failure to keep sober has spelt ruin for thousands.

Just as drunkenness inhibits the ability to respond quickly and decisively, this text is pointing out that worldly thinking also can intoxicate us and slow us down in our obedient response to the Lord. The world influences us with wrong expectations. Idolatry can cloud our thinking. Success can make us drunk. But success may be just a diversion which makes us take our eyes off our Captain.

Jesus never allowed this to happen to him. He always kept a long-range focus. Even in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the Jews hailed him as their King, he saw through all of their praise for what it was—a mere vapor. He saw beyond the momentary praise and honor to a garden, a kangaroo court, and a cross. He never allowed his thinking and his obedience to his heavenly Father to become clouded by the drunkenness which success can bring.

So we are not to allow suffering to derail our hope in the short run, but we are to be doggedly committed to fix our hope on the second coming of Christ. This not only takes diligent effort, it also requires advance preparation of the mind to be ready to answer the call of our Lord. Here is what the 18th century saint, Philip Doddridge, wrote along these lines,

Can you, even when your natural spirits are weak and low, and you are not in any frame of mind for the ardors and ecstasies of devotion, nevertheless find a pleasing rest, a calm repose of heart, in the thought that God is near you? That he sees the secret feelings of your soul while you are, as it were, laboring up the hill, and casting a longing eye toward Him, though you cannot say you enjoy any tangible communications from Him?<sup>1</sup>

That is how we should labor. Whether we feel like it or not, we must keep our long-range focus.

The next temptation is described in verses 14-16.

## II. Sloppy Ethics (1:14-17)

**As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”**

The second temptation we face in the midst of suffering is to compromise our ethics, to give way because of weariness to the old habit

patterns of our pre-Christian days. This is so easy to do, because these actions take no thought or struggle. We merely give in to the pressures from without to do from within what comes naturally.

We are especially vulnerable to “being conformed” to these lusts during a time of suffering. Just as it is supremely important for a ship to be correctly rigged during a storm, so it is equally important for the Christian who is undergoing suffering to be holy when the spotlight is shining on him. Think of Dave Dravecky, the pitcher who recovered from cancer surgery on his pitching arm and then broke his arm while pitching in his second game. In the midst of his suffering the whole world was watching. He did not indulge in self-pity or complaining; his ethics were not sloppy. It is even more important during suffering to maintain pure ethics. The antidote, says Peter, is to “be holy, like the Holy One who called you,” in all our behavior.

Of all the commands in this book, “be holy” is the one that jars me. How difficult it is to be holy! One evening last week, my wife went out for about an hour and a half, and my only assignment was to get our three daughters to bed. They had been fed and bathed—even most of their homework had been done. I had an hour and a half to do my part, but I got anything but instant obedience. It was the end of the day and I was tired, and I lost it through angry speech with all three of them, individually and collectively. When Emily got home, I asked her, “How do you do this all day? I give up!” I was intrigued to discover how easy it was not to be holy! I didn’t choose; it came naturally to me to be a wretch who provoked his children to anger. But the command is to “be holy,” so how do we do it?

Let us first define what to “be holy” means.

### A. The Definition of Holiness

The word “holy” is used four times for emphasis in these verses. The Hebrew idea behind the word is “to be separated out from the world so as to belong completely to God for his use alone.” We are to be so immersed in God that our life becomes as transcendent and perfect as his. But the Scriptures tell us that God is so high above man in the way he thinks and acts that his thoughts are not like ours, his actions are not like ours. If we want to measure the difference, according to Isaiah, it is a huge chasm that is higher than the heavens are above the earth.

God had to teach this principle of holiness in a graduated scale to the Old Testament saints. For instance, all of the earth belonged to God, but Israel was his in a special way. But the land of Bashan was even more fertile and even more holy. Then the temple area, where God would dwell, was even more holy. The outer courts were holy, but holier still were the inner courts, the Holy Place, and finally, the Holy of Holies. Between each of these divisions there was a wall. Nobody could walk through any of these places willy-nilly. They had to be ritually purified and cleansed or else the holiness of these places would result in their death. The Old Testament also taught that this holiness had to be protected from defilement. Thus, a leper could not enter the temple. A prostitute could not enter. Neither could a Gentile. All of these separations were meant to protect the holiness of God. This is how the Old Testament saints learned what it meant to be holy.

But when Jesus came from heaven to earth, the heavenly temple now dwelt among men, so there no longer was need for a temple of stone. Holiness therefore is intensified in the New Testament age. Jesus was not defiled when he touched the leper. He was not defiled when the woman with the issue of blood touched him. On the contrary, Jesus’ holiness was such that he cleansed them, sanctified them

and made them whole through forgiving their sins. Holiness is intensified. Jesus died on the cross, and was raised from the dead, and he sent his Spirit to live inside believers in a relationship with him. Now the law, which was formerly written on stone, is written on believers' hearts to make them holy. Now he sends his pilgrims all over the world possessing this intensified, relational holiness.

There is a great difference between saints in the Old and New Testament eras as to how they should act in the world. In the Old Testament, for instance, if a man found an uncleanness in his wife, he could divorce her and send her away. I think this uncleanness was idolatry. If the woman was bringing idolatry into the home, for the sake of the home she could be divorced by her husband. But in the New Testament, the apostle says that if one is married to an unbeliever, which is idolatry, one is to remain in the marriage because the believing partner sanctifies the children of that union.

Holiness is intensified! I am not saying that the world is not a dangerous place or that we cannot be defiled by it. This book tells us, however, that by means of the Holy Spirit we can be in the world, but rather than the world destroying us we can bring transcendence to whatever situation we find ourselves in because of what Jesus Christ has done. In the New Testament, holiness is intensified.

### B. The Basis for Holiness

Thus holiness is not mere ethics. It is not accomplished by trying to imitate God. The holy God who lives in our hearts himself transcends our homes, our work place, wherever we find ourselves. We can depend on him and his life for whatever we need. "Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior." So don't you husbands tell your wives when you are rebuked, "I'm sorry, but that's me. You're stuck with me. My parents didn't communicate; neither do I." You wives, don't say to your husbands, "I was abused when I was young, so I can't love you. You're stuck." You can be holy "according to the Holy One who called you."

### C. The Extent of Holiness

The New Testament tells us that we can be holy in all our behavior because of what Jesus has done. When you pay your taxes, be holy. Be holy when you stand in line. In Eastern Europe last year, a number of us were waiting in line for a chair lift on a mountain. Our hosts put a couple of their people in line to reserve places for the rest of us while we toured the area. When we returned, the line had grown considerably, and our group of about 15 Americans and nationals prepared to enter the line ahead of everybody. But my friend Jim refused to do this, and went instead to the end of the line, a four and a half hour wait. That was a holy response to a situation he faced. In the transcendence of this incident he ended up having a ministry to those he found himself waiting beside at the end of the line.

Peter says that believers are to be dressed in readiness, prepared to obey their Lord. The next step is to not compromise their ethics, but to present themselves fully to God, to be holy in every area.

In the next section, verses 17-21, the apostle tells us what will keep us motivated to continue living in this state of ready obedience. Sometimes the storms of life go on so long we are tempted to give up. This happened once to Peter. During a storm at sea, he woke Jesus up and cried, "Don't you care? We're perishing!" He was losing his motivation.

## III. Lost Motivation (1:17-21)

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

When we see the wicked prospering, and there is no apparent reward for our own purity of heart, we are tempted to lose motivation. Here, Peter repeats the same command (though he uses a different verb, "conduct oneself in fear," instead of "be holy"), knowing how easy it is, living in the present age, to lose our motivation for holy living. Often we think like Asaph, in Psalm 73, whose perspective is clouded as he sees the rewards of the wicked and the plight of the righteous:

Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!  
But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling...  
For I was envious of the arrogant,  
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
For there are no pains in their death;  
And their body is fat.  
They are not in trouble as other men;  
Nor are they plagued like mankind.  
Therefore pride is their necklace...  
Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. (Ps 73:1-6a, 13a)

What is the antidote to this as we live in the midst of the storms? Three things are to motivate us, says Peter.

### A. Knowing the Fear of the Lord

This term, "the fear of the Lord," has two aspects. First, an objective aspect: The term assumes that God has revealed his will, and that his will is known; and second, a subjective aspect: The individual then gives his whole heart to serving God as he has revealed himself.

"And since you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work..." One day, says Peter, we will die, and this wonderful Being whom we call Heavenly Father will don the cloak of a judge. As we stand before him his penetrating eye will look past our deeds to our motives, our thoughts and our attitudes, and we will be judged according to our works. Though we are saved by grace, through faith, our judgment is based on works. This is a powerful motivator for righteous living during our short, temporary stay upon the earth. Everything God has said regarding sin will come to pass.

But we find a stronger and more powerful motivator in verses 18-19.

### B. Knowing The Love Of The Lord

"...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood." Contemplate the cost of your redemption—the precious blood of our Lord Jesus. While I was studying at Stanford University, one of the things that motivated me to do well was the fact that my father was paying for my education. I had turned down a full scholarship to another university, and I didn't receive a dime

to go to Stanford; my father paid the price in full, in silver and gold (today it does cost blood!).

We all have inherited a very futile way of life from our forefathers. I have found that we all come from futile backgrounds. Nothing works as it should. We are all dysfunctional. The more we probe into our past, the more futility we discover. The reason for this is that Adam was dysfunctional. When he died, the whole race died. Don't blame your parents or your grandparents; it all goes back to Adam. God turned this whole universe over to Adam, and in one active lie, Adam turned it over to the devil and to darkness.

What did it cost to redeem what Adam had done, to redeem you and me? No amount of silver or gold could accomplish this. The price was the blood of his only Son. In the movie "Sophie's Choice," the mother had to decide which one of her two children she had to turn over to the Nazis. Just imagine the pain that caused her. But God had just one Son, his only-begotten Jesus.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read of the excruciating pain the Father suffered in giving up his only Son. In Samuel, we read of the pain an earthly father, David, suffered over the pain his rebellious son had caused him. David had many sons, but listen to these words describing his grief over Absalom:

**And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33)**

These words, poignant as they are, are not even a hint of what God the Father suffered when he had to give up his Son. He did not have to turn over his Son to the evil Nazis, but to the Romans, the Sanhedrin, and, behind them, the devil himself and all of his demonic darkness.

What further complicates this is that the Father in his sovereignty had orchestrated these events. He had designed history so that it would work out this way. He himself was indirectly responsible for the pain. Behind the beating, the mockery, the crown of thorns and the bloodshed was the wrath of God toward sin. What pain! But nowhere do we find a description of the pain to the Father's heart all of this caused. He loved us so much he did all of this for us. Love was his motivation, and that love is the strongest motivation upon the human heart.

God is just. God is loving. And God is faithful.

### C. Knowing the Faithfulness of the Lord

*"He has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."* God demonstrated his faithfulness in history by bringing to fulfillment his glorious plan of redemption which he had in mind since the beginning of time. But especially in our time God has made good his promises to the Fathers, and shown his utter faithfulness to his word by means of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Such a demonstration ought to evoke a sense of overwhelming privilege as we participate in this fulfillment. This also strengthens our faith that our God can be trusted entirely. As we look to the future, we know that what God has begun he will indeed finish.

What keeps us motivated to holy conduct? Peter's words to us here are: Fear, love, and God's faithfulness. We could add, as does the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, "but the greatest of these is love."

As I watched the television news reports of the damage done on the East Coast by the great hurricane Hugo, when the sea was whipped up by the great winds and it left its place to destroy cities, I thought of the wreckage of many Christian lives today. We are a generation of shipwrecked Christians. Many have given up their hope for the age to come and have fallen for the illusions of this present age. Others are adrift upon the seas of life, not going anywhere. They have forgotten how to use their sextant. They are tossed to and fro by the winds. We see other shipwrecks, the floating debris of others who failed to be storm-prepared in obedience. The storm overcame them and they drowned in the pleasures of this age. Others have run aground. The storms they face never seem to end. They just lie there battered. They don't have the strength to hoist their sails afresh.

As we see all this carnage around us, we are tempted to come about and sail for the nearest safe haven. We are tempted to trade in our sailboat for a houseboat. We want to tie up at the dock and rest at anchor. We say we are living on the sea, but we never venture forth to new waters. The dangers are too great, we say. Others trade in their sailboats for the Love Boat. Surrounded by others of the same persuasion, and living in luxury, they never take risks and never touch anyone else. (I'm not sure the Love Boat has our destination on its itinerary.) Friends, I would rather die at sea than rust away at the dock!

Peter warns us that it is dangerous out there. The sea is not a safe place. But this keeps our focus clear. The danger keeps us close to our Captain, the Lord Jesus. It forces us to bring him into every situation we encounter, to keep course correcting. It keeps us weak so that he can be strong. It makes us lean on his love and faithfulness.

So let us keep on sailing into adventure and danger. This is where God wants us to be. He has promised to take us safely through the storms until that day when we see him on the shore. Then we will be safely home. We will have reached the new heavens and the new earth, and there will be no more storms, no more sea. On that day we will say with Isaiah,

**Was it not Thou who dried up the sea,  
The waters of the great deep;  
Who made the depths of the sea a pathway  
For the redeemed to cross over?  
So the ransomed of the Lord will return,  
And come with joyful shouting to Zion;  
And everlasting joy will be on their heads.  
They will obtain gladness and joy,  
And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isa 51:10-11)**

1. Philip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745), in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 183.

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