

“ANSWER THE QUESTION!”

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Text: 1 Peter 3:15

A couple of years ago, the Upper Sandusky Area Ministerial Association gave up on holding a community Good Friday service. The last one held was in 2016, and the preachers and choir outnumbered the rest of the worshippers.

The unfortunate reality in today’s world is that businesses and government offices no longer honor Good Friday, and folks could not attend a worship service in the afternoon anymore even if they wanted to. Meanwhile, individual churches were having their own worship services in the evening, and the Association didn’t want to infringe on that time, so the tradition came to an end.

As an Association, we struggled for over a year about how to still have an impact on the community that day, and that’s when we adopted to the project of the “Thank you Jesus” signs.

A teenager from North Carolina wanted to have his own impact on people, so he came up with this sign, had some printed, and put them up around his community. Today, his idea has become a national movement, having spread into most of the 50 states. (I would highly recommend this church become involved in this movement.)

So, we fronted the money to buy 200 signs at \$8 apiece, charged \$10, and gave the \$2 profit to a local faith-based charity called Open Door Resource Center. We instructed the folks to put their signs in the yard at dusk the night before Easter, so there would be a sudden appearance of all the signs the next morning. We also placed a full-color version of the sign in a large ad in the Daily Chief-Union that Saturday, along with an invitation to people to attend the church of their choice.

In the course of the project, one of the pastors in the association said someone not from his church had seen the sign and asked the pastor this fateful question;

“Thank you, Jesus, for what?”

For those of us who grew up in the church...for those of us who have been exposed to a Christian life for most or all of our life...a question like that is pretty hard to imagine.

You would have to have led a life that was totally, 100% separated from Christianity in order to not understand why it is that a Christian would be grateful to Jesus. That's pretty hard to imagine. It is pretty hard for us to put ourselves in the shoes of someone that uninformed about the very basic premise of Christianity.

Those of us who come to church to worship God...and show Him our praise...and offer our thanks for how he loves us...and do all of that as a matter of course...because that's the way it is...because we believe it without thinking...might even be tempted to chuckle a little bit about the question "Thank you Jesus, for what?"

But...because none of us knows exactly when the day of judgment will come...because none of us knows exactly when Jesus will return to Earth to take us home with Him...I say this; We don't have time to mess around.

Within these walls we can share together how good it feels to be part of the family of God. Within these walls, we can be with people who are of like mind, heart and spirit, and leave here having felt good about our worship experience.

But here's the thing about these walls; on the other side of them, are people asking the question, "Thank you Jesus, for what?"

Every time you leave this building and exit through those beautiful doors with the pretty glass, **YOU ARE ENTERING THE MISSION FIELD!**

We'll come back to that.

Just to make sure we're all on the same page, let's answer the question. Anyone. Shout out your answer; Thank you Jesus for..... _____

Very good. Being able to articulate the answer to that question is very important.

And the reason it's important is explained to us by one of Jesus's disciples – Peter.

“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” (1 Peter 3:13-17)

It’s a great big world out there. Billions of people around the planet. Thousands of people here in Crawford County. And in this mad, mad world in which we live there are people who don’t know the answer to the question.

Peter is telling us it is our responsibility to stand out in the crowd, and be ready to answer it.

Wait a minute. Peter? Really? Peter? The guy who three times was identified by people in a crowd as being one of Jesus’ disciples, and each time denied even knowing Jesus...that guy? Peter? Peter is going to lecture me about testifying to my faith?

Yah. *Especially Peter.*

It’s not easy being a Christian. Living up to the Ten Commandments, and all the commandments and examples Jesus left for us, is not easy. Some of us know that more than others.

Harder yet – especially for those among us who are not comfortable standing out in a crowd, or speaking confidently or with authority on any topic – is offering an explanation about our faith.

Being the one who stands out in a crowd to answer the question, “Thank you Jesus, for what?” is not always easy.

And...you may not feel like you’re qualified. After all, no one likes a hypocrite. And isn’t that basically what we just saw from Peter in that scripture? Hypocrisy?

Well, let me reassure you.

God uses even you. In fact, God uses especially you!

Think through the Bible stories you know as I read off this list:

Jacob was a cheater. Peter had a temper. David had an affair. Noah was a drunk. Jonah ran from God. Paul was murderer. Gideon was insecure. Miriam was a gossip. Martha was a worrier. Thomas was a doubter. Sara was impatient. Elijah was moody. Mary Magdalene was a hooker. Moses stuttered. Zaccheus was short. Abraham was old. And Lazarus was dead!

Yet God used every one of those people to teach others.

You think you're not qualified to testify?

God doesn't call the qualified...He qualifies the called!!!

And THAT...is the answer to the question.

In that mission field beyond these walls are people waiting to hear the answer to the question, "Thank you Jesus for what?"

We are all called to be ministers of the gospel.

We are all called to tell the greatest story ever told.

We are all called to answer the question.

But you don't have to preach a sermon worthy of Billy Graham to do it. You just have to live – live according to the examples set by all the hypocrites in the Bible.

Do you think you can do that? I know you can. Amen? Please pray with me...

Thank you, Jesus, for showing up in Jerusalem even though you knew what was coming. Thank you, Jesus, for not running, or trying to escape when you were arrested. Thank you, Jesus, for taking all that torture and punishment. Thank you, Jesus, for your sacrifice at the direction of your Father so we could be forgiven and live forever. Thank you, Jesus, for saving us. Amen.