

Message #4

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1 Peter

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BE HOLY

1 PETER 1:13-21

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

.The Bible (PROJECTOR ON--- HEBREWS 12:14) says, “...**without holiness no one will see the Lord.**” Holiness is not an especially popular virtue in our culture. Success, tolerance, love, self-fulfillment, justice, and even service rate much higher in our culture’s scale of values. Holiness gets a lot of bad press. We hear about a “holier than thou” attitude. Some of us have heard of an individual being called “a holy joe.” In both cases holiness comes off in a rather bad light. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Even in Christian circles, if we were told that someone unknown to us was a very holy person, I suspect that most of us would have at least a couple of reactions. We would have a respect for this individual’s spirituality, and we wouldn’t care to get very close to him or her. An especially holy person certainly wouldn’t be much fun. Being around him or her might tend to make us feel guilty. Probably this person would not be quite in contact with reality. Deep down I suspect that many of us would regard a person wearing this label as--- unattractive.

When we think of holy people, we may think of someone like Mother Theresa. We respect her and the legacy which she left, but we don’t necessarily want to be like her. We may think of the flaming evangelist who presses the case for the gospel to the point of tactless pushiness. We might think of an individual like Simon Stylites, who lived in the fourth century in Syria. He sought to attain holiness by living on a platform two yards square placed on a pole that was raised 60 feet above the ground. He supposedly spent 37 years of his life on this pole, praying and preaching. It was said that he bowed down on his platform 1,244 times each day.

As a young person, my picture of holiness was the pastor of my church. I respected him, but I had no desire to be like him. As far as I could tell, he didn’t know very much about sports. He wore robes on Sundays and seemed to be different from everybody else. He wasn’t a role model that I wanted to follow.

This popular conception of holiness, however, has little to do with the Biblical model. Jesus Christ was the most holy human being who ever lived. Yet He was an incredibly attractive individual. The Bible tells us that tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, and fishermen followed him around and wanted him at their dinner parties. In fact, the ones who found Jesus to be repulsive were the religious types whom most

people in that culture regarded as fitting the label “holy.” Jesus called these popularly regarded holy people “hypocrites” and “enemies of God.”

C. S. Lewis (PROJECTOR ON--- CS LEWIS) once wrote, **“How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, ...it is irresistible.”** We want to consider the real thing this morning.

In our study of the First Epistle of Peter we have discovered that the Apostle Peter was writing to Christians living in Asia Minor in the first century who were faced with trials. (PROJECTOR OFF) To encourage them Peter in the first two verses reminds them of their identity as individuals who were chosen by God and who are aliens, or strangers, upon the earth.

We saw last week, in vv. 3-12, that believers can persevere in the face of trials if they focus on the prospect of a future inheritance that awaits them, if they realize that there is a divine purpose for trials in the present, and if they remember the significance of their eternal salvation about which men and women of faith in the past have testified. Now he talks about how Christians should behave in the midst of these trials.

I.

So let’s consider first THE EXHORTATION TO HOLINESS (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE EXHORTATION TO HOLINESS) in vv. 14-16, which can be found on p. 1014 in the black Bibles. The inspired author writes, beginning in v. 14, **“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”** Peter stresses that even in the midst of trials the behavior of Christians ought to be characterized by holiness.

Holiness is not to be confused with perfection or with an external conformity to rules. A sociologist by the name of Donna Freitas wrote a book that was published in 2017, entitled *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media Is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*. As a result of online surveys and over 200 interviews with college students, she found that these young adults **“have an overwhelming urge to present themselves as successful and happy.”** These college students **“were all shockingly aware of the watchful eyes of their peers--- and of the corresponding need to routinely spiff up their profiles.”** (*Christianity Today*, March 2017)

Biblical holiness is nothing like that. Peter quoted the Old Testament in our passage to show the importance of holiness for God’s people. Many scholars suspect that the Hebrew word had an original meaning of “to be set apart.” Early in its usage in the Old Testament holiness was associated with a consecration to God or to His worship. In some contexts it has the idea of moral purity.

(PROJECTOR ON--- 1 KINGS 8:4) In 1 Kings # 8 v. 4 we encounter this usage: **“And they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up.”** These utensils are called “holy” because they are to be used only in the tabernacle or the temple. They are not for common use. They are set aside for a religious purpose.

In Exodus #30 God commands the people to make a certain kind of incense that is to be burned on the altar before the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle. (EXODUS 30:37) In vv. 37 & 38 the Lord tells Moses, **“And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the Lord. (EXODUS 30:38) Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people.”** The formula for this incense is not to be used for any other purpose. This incense is holy. It is set apart for a special use.

Isaiah #6 says that God Himself is holy. The prophet sees the Lord sitting on His throne, and he hears an angel (ISAIAH 6:3) saying, **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts...”** God is set apart from every other being in the universe. He is majestic and lofty and exalted. He is morally pure.

(DEUTERONOMY 7:6) In Deuteronomy #7 the nation of Israel is described as “holy.” That verse says, **“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”** The nation of Israel is set apart from the other nations of the world for God’s special possession. It is God who chooses the descendants of Abraham. The Hebrews are not morally pure, but they are chosen by God and set apart for His purposes.

(LEVITICUS 19:2) Then in Leviticus #19, which Peter quotes in our passage, God says to the Hebrew people, **“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”** So this holiness, this apartness, this moral purity that God possesses is in turn something that His people, whom He has set apart, are to cultivate.

What responsibility does that involve for God’s people? (PROJECTOR OFF) In the first five verses of Deuteronomy #7 Moses tells the people of Israel that when they enter the Promised Land, they are to destroy the other tribes which reside there. They are not to intermarry with their people or make agreements with them. They are to destroy their objects of worship. Why? Because Israel is a holy people and these other nations will corrupt them and draw them away from obedience to the Lord. So the holiness that God desires from His people involves a being set apart from ungodly practices to devotion to God.

By the time that Jesus came upon the scene, the religious leaders of Israel had made holiness into a code of conduct that was based upon picky rules that often had little relationship to the commands of the Old Testament. In the gospels we find a record of the life of Jesus that is an example of holiness. While Jesus was sinless and did not engage in behavior contrary to Old Testament standards, His focus was not upon a legalistic code of conduct. In fact, we saw in our study of John’s Gospel that it was Jesus’ healing of people on the Sabbath in violation of the religious leaders’ interpretation of the Sabbath commandment that got Him in trouble with the supposed holy leaders of His day. Yet the holiness of Jesus was attractive and inviting and positive.

In the New Testament epistles we learn something else about holiness. For Christians there is a past, a present, and a future aspect of holiness. When Christians trusted Jesus as their Savior in the past, they

became holy ones, or saints. The term “saints” in the Bible literally means “holy ones.” Whenever someone becomes a true Christian, in the Biblical view, that person is a saint.

The Bible also describes a time yet future when we Christians will meet Christ face to face. The Apostle John (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 JOHN 3:2) writes in his first epistle, “...**but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.**” That describes the future aspect of holiness.

In the meantime we Christians are supposed to become more holy in our daily lives. (PROJECTOR OFF) This is the present aspect of our holiness, and it is this aspect that is the concern of the Apostle Peter in our passage.

What does it mean to live holy lives in the midst of trials? Verse 14 suggests that obedience has something to do with it. Holy people will be Christians who are growing in their obedience to the Lord. Verse 14 also says that people in pursuit of holiness are not to be conformed to “the passions of your former ignorance.” So this holiness thing stands in contrast to certain kinds of behavior.

In #4 v. 3 we have a probable indication of the kind of passions that Peter had in mind. In v. 2 he mentions “human passions.” In v. 3 of #4 he says, “**For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.**” Holiness involves staying away from the unhealthy desires of the passions, of the flesh, of the old sin nature.

But holiness is much more than that. According to v. 15 in our text it means being like God in all our behavior. If we want to picture what holiness is like, we should think about how Jesus behaved in the world. We will never match His sinlessness in this earthly life, but we can develop godly character and become more and more Christlike if we trust in the Lord to accomplish this in us.

In the remainder of Peter’s letter he talks more specifically about how we can develop and display this holiness. In #2 v. 11 (1 PETER 2:11) he says, “**Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.**” In v. 12 (1 PETER 2:12) he says, “**Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable...**” In vv. 13-17 he talks about holiness in a Christian’s relationship to government. He says, “**Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.**” In vv. 18-25 he talks about holiness in a Christian’s involvement in the workplace: “**Servants, be submissive to your masters.**” (PROJECTOR OFF)

Then in #3 vv. 1-7 he describes holiness in a Christian’s relationship to his family. He says that holy wives should be submissive to their husbands, and holy husbands should understand their wives and grant them honor. In coming weeks we will explore these holy relationships in greater detail.

Peter’s point is that we as Christians should strive to be holy in all of our behavior, even in the midst of trials. Oswald Chambers says, “**God has one destined end for mankind, viz., holiness. His one aim is the**

production of saints. God is not an eternal blessing machine for men; He did not come to save men out of pity: He came to save men because He had created them to be holy.”

When I got married, I thought that I was a pretty giving person. But having been single for 29 years of my life, I had developed independent ways of being. Having a mate around quickly made me aware that I had some rough edges that needed refining. The Lord uses trials in a similar way in the lives of believers. One purpose that they serve is to refine us, to make us more holy. The crucial issue is how we will behave in them.

There are some people who get married and refuse to change their lifestyles. They expect their partner to change or just get used to the way that they are. These individuals don't mature. The result is often broken marriages or marriages that are, at the least, unhappy.

A similar thing can happen to Christians who encounter trials. One purpose that God has for trials is to refine us, to make us more holy. But we can choose to refuse to pursue maturity and holiness. We can refuse to grow. We can refuse to submit or to forgive or to obey. The result is stunted growth and unhappiness. We Christians are commanded to pursue holiness, even in the midst of trials.

II.

Our passage also provides us with THE MOTIVATION FOR HOLINESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE MOTIVATION FOR HOLINESS) Peter describes four reasons why we should strive to be holy.

A.

The first thing that should motivate us to holy living is THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. (II. THE MOTIVATION... A. THE SECOND COMING...) Notice v. 13: **“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** The only verb of command in the original Greek text is “set your hope.” So Peter's primary emphasis in this verse is setting our hope upon Christ's Second Coming. That process begins in the mind.

Why should that motivate us to holy living? In Peter's second letter he again talks about the Second Coming. In #3 he says that when Christ comes back, the world is going to be burned up and the world system will be destroyed. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 PETER 3:14) In v. 14 he says, **“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”** We Christians should pursue holiness because the things for which many people around us live are going to burn up. The houses, the clothes, the boats, the cars, the cameras, the computers are all going to burn. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Working to accumulate more things is a limited investment. It is service and character and the development of holiness that will pay eternal dividends. Yet what is it that occupies our thinking? We do have a responsibility to provide for ourselves and our families. We have a responsibility to be wise with our financial resources. But do we give the same attention to the development of godly character?

In v. 13 of #1 Peter says that Christians will receive grace at the Second Coming. I take that to include the inheritance that we talked about last week. The Bible says that we will also receive lasting rewards for faithfulness. Therefore we need to set ourselves apart for that which is eternal, looking forward to the Second Coming.

Christianity Today editor Mark Galli observes (*CT*, 11/19/1990), **“Luther and Edwards, to name two, were so taken with Christ, so anxious about seeing him face to face, that they acted sometimes like young, impatient lovers. They jumped every time the phone of history rang.**

“Ever since, of course, history has been beating them with a purse, mocking their lack of eschatological sophistication, smirking at the mention of those dumb predictions--- and worse: patronizing them by ignoring this part of their work... I wonder, however, if they possessed something--- were possessed by something--- that I have lost, and that makes me the lesser for the lack of it.

“When I lead a Bible study or preach a sermon, I approach the Bible with the sophistication that this age demands, using all the tools of modern biblical scholarship, tools that these men had no access to. I understand many subtle complexities of the world of which they were never aware. But am I, to put it awkwardly, in love with Christ as they were?

“I remain steadfastly suspicious of preachers who predict the second coming of Christ at the drop of an international crisis. I know it has been wrongly predicted a thousand times before. I know that no reasonable or compassionate Christian lets Christ’s return dominate his or her mind when there is so much to be done for the needy today.

“But I think it is time to fall in love again. Naturally, I cannot go back and simply repeat the things I did as a young lover. I am a different person from what I was then. And I do not know exactly what form my foolishness will take. But I am sure it will include bouts of eager impatience as I wonder what it will be like to see my lover again. Better stay clear of my front door.”

Jesus told us to be ready. He told us to pursue holiness. In the midst of the trials of life we need to continue our pursuit of godliness.

B.

The second motivation that we have to live holy lives is described in v. 15. We have received THE CALL OF THE HOLY ONE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A. B. THE CALL OF THE HOLY ONE) God has called us to Himself. Peter is not talking about the general invitation that God makes to people to be saved. In this first chapter he is stressing God’s sovereign work in our individual salvation.

(HOSEA 11:1) In Hosea #11 v. 1 God said, **“When Israel was a child, I loved Him/ And out of Egypt I called My son.”** The Lord did not say to the Hebrews, “Hey, Hebrews, if you would like to, come on over here with me. If you want me to, I will lead you out of Egypt.” That isn’t what happened. The Lord compelled them to come out. The Hebrews were reluctant. They resisted Moses’ leadership and the Lord’s leadership. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In this chapter Peter has likewise been stressing God’s role in our salvation. In v. 1 he said, “You were chosen by God.” In v. 3 he said, “God caused us to be born again.” Now in v. 15 he says, “God called us.”

When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He took them to Mt. Sinai. There he made a covenant with them. On at least three specific occasions He said to the nation, “Be holy for I am holy.” “Because I chose you and delivered you from Egypt, you have a responsibility to be holy like I am.”

Now Peter is telling the people of God in the New Testament a similar thing. Because God the Father has graciously called and chosen you, you have a responsibility to Him. You are special people. But special people have an obligation to pursue holiness even in the midst of trials.

Years ago I was leading a Bible study in a county jail. One of the inmates had a pass to leave the jail for Christmas day if he could get someone to take him and be with him for the day. I didn’t have any special plans that Christmas. So I agreed to take this fellow in his early twenties with me.

During the day we stopped for just a brief visit with his family. That was enough for me to understand part of the reason for this guy’s imprisonment. There was no father in the house. The mother had a foul mouth. Even with a religious type present--- me--- everyone was swearing at everyone else. Not even this young man’s family thought that there was anything special about this inmate. It was no surprise that he didn’t sense any responsibility toward his family in regard to his behavior.

God says that we are special. We are chosen members of His family. Therefore our behavior should reflect the calling that we have from God. We should not behave just like our neighbors do. We should not reflect the same ethical values that our coworkers may reflect. We should not act like the majority of kids at school may act.

C.

Verse 17 describes a third motivation for us to be holy. It says that we are faced with THE FATHER’S JUDGMENT. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. B. C. THE FATHER’S JUDGMENT) We have a Father who impartially judges our work. He disciplines us in our present life when we get off course, just as a good earthly father does. But Peter probably has in mind the future judgment that all Christians will eventually receive. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10) The Apostle Paul refers to this judgment in 2 Corinthians #5 v. 10 when he writes, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”**

This is not a judgment that determines whether we go to heaven or hell. This is a judgment for Christians that determines the extent of our rewards in heaven. The prospect of this judgment should motivate us toward holiness.

Paul describes this future judgment in a bit more detail in #3 of 1 Corinthians. (1 CORINTHIANS 3:11) Beginning in v. 11 he writes, **“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 CORINTHIAN 3:12) Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--- (1 CORINTHIANS 3:13) each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. (1 CORINTHIANS 3:14) If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward, (1CORINTHIANS 3:15) If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”**

Peter says that the prospect of this judgment should cause us to conduct our lives in fear. By “fear” he means a sense of respect or reverence, not a sense of dread or terror. God is a loving Father. In any good father-child relationship the child will have a sense of respect for his father. Most of us have wanted to please our fathers by what we have done with our lives. The respect which this involves should motivate us toward proper behavior during the course of our lives upon this earth, which Peter describes as an “exile.”

D.

We should be motivated to holy living then by the Second Coming of Christ, by the call of God, by the Father’s judgment, and fourthly by THE REDEMPTION WHICH CHRIST PROVIDED US. (II. C. D. THE REDEMPTION WHICH CHRIST...) Look at vv. 18-21. Peter says, **“...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ...”**

Ransom, or redemption, meant different things to the Jews and to the Gentiles. The Hebrew term used in the Old Testament for this concept meant to transfer the ownership of someone or something to another through the payment of a price. When God delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, He did it at the price of the death of the firstborns. (DEUTERONOMY 7:8) Thus we read in Deuteronomy #7 v. 8, **“...the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”** Peter’s description of Christ as an unblemished lamb was an obvious reference to the Passover lamb that was killed just before the Hebrews were set free from Egypt and served as a substitute for their firstborns. (PROJECTOR OFF)

To the Gentiles the idea of redemption had a slightly different meaning. They used the term to describe the release of a slave from slavery. In Greek law a slave could be freed if he somehow saved up enough money, or if friends or relatives came up with the cash. That money would be brought to the temple or shrine of a pagan god. There an official would take it, subtract a commission for himself, and then bring it to the slave owner. The god, or goddess, got credit for rescuing the slave. Often there would be a sacrifice made in connection with the transaction. The slave would then be ransomed, or redeemed, or set free.

Peter, aware of the dual meaning of the concept of redemption, says that the blood of Christ was the ransom, or redemption price, for our freedom. God's absolute holiness required a redemption price of infinite value. Only the death of the Son of God in our place could provide the necessary payment. As a result we were freed from our slavery to sin--- **"from our futile way of life"**-- as Peter describes it in v. 18.

In v. 20 he further describes the significance of this sacrifice: **"He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the 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."**

Peter's primary point in these last four verses is that if God was willing to make such a tremendous sacrifice to provide for our redemption, we should be motivated to seek after holiness. We should be holy because God redeemed us, because He will judge us, because we have been called by the Holy One and because Christ is coming back.

Most people who are asked about their goal in life respond something to the effect that they want to have a happy life. That is understandable. But the goal that God has for us who have trusted in Jesus as our Savior is not happiness but holiness. That is not to say that happiness and joy are excluded from the Christian life, or that happiness and holiness do not go together. It does mean that God will bring difficult experiences across the paths of Christians, and some believers may seem to have more than their share of trials. But when we realize the incredible things that God has done for us and all that He has in store for us, we should be motivated to be holy in all of our behavior.

In 1943 William Kiessel was a soldier sent to England to prepare for the invasion of Europe. He wrote a letter (Andrew Carroll, *Grace Under Fire: Letters of Faith in Times of War*) to friends that he did not want prayer for his safety, because, as he put it, **"Safety isn't the ultimate goal. True exemplary conduct is."** He added, **"What is important is that whatever does happen to me I will do absolutely nothing that will shame my character or my God."** In the battles that we face that is likewise the goal. Our battles may be of a different sort. They may involve health challenges, family conflicts, temptations, and priorities. But they are real. In the midst of them we are to be holy as He is holy.