

About ten days ago, the sickness bug ran through the Hamel house. I was the first to get sick and the first to recover. That meant that last week, when I was here with you at church, Keren and the kids were home sick. My family hates missing church, so of course they tuned in online. When the worship service began, Addie got out her toy microphone and started praising, and Keren sent me this picture [view the online sermon to see the photo]. As a follower of Jesus, there is nothing sweeter in all the world than seeing children praise God. Jesus said, “From the lips of children you, Lord, have called forth praise.”

Last week, our passage was all about worship. We looked at these words: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3), and we talked about the many reasons we have been given to praise God. In this passage, Peter is going to get practical and show us *how* to worship God. Singing worship songs is wonderful, but what Scripture teaches us is that what God really wants is lives that have been changed and transformed. Worship is not only about the songs we sing or what we do for an hour on Sunday; it’s how we live our lives. As we continue reading 1 Peter 1, we’ll discover that **worshipful lives = holiness**. The primary thrust of our passage is in 1:16, where God says, “Be holy, because I am holy.” Let’s read this passage together, and then we’ll talk about how we can apply it to our lives.

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. 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 ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:13-21)

This passage is all about holiness, a word is used four times in these verses! We are going to talk about what holiness looks like, how to live holy lives, and why to live holy lives.

What Is Holiness?

At the most basic level, the words translated “holy” in both the Hebrew and the Greek of Scripture mean “to be set apart.” In many homes there are plates that are used for regular purposes throughout the year, then there is also a set of fine china plates. They are both plates, but some are for common purposes, and some are for special meals, so they are kept in a different cabinet and used for different occasions. The best analogy I know of for

holiness is relational, specifically marriage, because marriage shows us what it means to be set apart *from* and set apart *for*. When a bride and a groom stand at the altar and make promises to one another, they say, “We are pledging our lives to one another! I now belong to you, and you now belong to me. And because we belong to one another, each of us is now set apart.” In the marriage vows they say to one another, “Forsaking all others, I will be faithful to you alone for as long as we both shall live.” Part of marriage is saying, “I belong to you, and I don’t belong to anyone else. I won’t give my heart or my love or my body to anyone else, only to you. I am set apart from everyone else.” That is a baseline essential requirement for a healthy marriage. But we all know that avoiding adultery isn’t enough by itself to have a good marriage. Imagine I went to Keren this afternoon and said, “Baby, I love you so much!” And she said, “Thank you. That means so much to me. How can I know you love me so much?” And I got proud and self-confident and said, “I’ll tell you how: I did not cheat on you today.” I can’t imagine she would be swept off her feet! Now of course, I can love Keren and engage with other people, but love is about so much more than simply what we avoid and what we proactively do: words of affirmation, quality time, acts of service, gifts, physical touch. The same is true in our relationship with God—holiness is not just about the lifestyle we avoid, but the lifestyle we pursue.

This was seen as clearly as possible in Jesus’ ministry in his interaction with the Pharisees. Did you know that they gave themselves the name “the holy ones”? That is literally what the name Pharisee means: the holy ones, the set apart ones. They saw that the people around them weren’t living lives that honored God, so they said, “We are going to specialize in holiness. We are going to study every law, study every rule, discover every possible way we could sin, and avoid sinful behavior at all possible costs.” They made holiness their full-time job. They did a great job at the “set apart from” part, but when Jesus spoke to them, he called them hypocrites, snakes, blind guides, and whitewashed tombs. He said, “Everything you do is for others to see, and you look good on the outside, but your motives are corrupt!” He said, “You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. It’s great that you tithe; that’s an important rule to follow. But while you are counting out your spices one by one, you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.” Holiness isn’t only about following the rules and keeping the letter of the law; it’s about pursuing the things that matter most to the heart of God. Jesus summed it up perfectly with these words: “You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former” (Matthew 23:23). In other words, the Pharisees gave themselves the wrong name, because they weren’t truly holy. Holiness isn’t only about what you avoid; it’s also about what you do. Physically speaking, it’s both avoiding junk food and working out. Financially speaking, it’s both not cheating on your taxes and being generous with those in need. Relationally speaking, it’s both avoiding gossip and using our words to build up and encourage others. Spiritually speaking, it’s both avoiding sin and spending time with Jesus in prayer and loving people in Jesus’ name.

How Do We Live Holy Lives?

Once we understand what holiness is—set apart from, set apart for a Christ-like transformation of life—the next question becomes how do we live holy lives? Peter gives four answers to this question in our passage.

“Minds that are alert and fully sober” (1 Peter 1:13). First, Peter says we need a *sound mind*. We all know the difference between alert and sober, specifically when it comes to driving. No one in this country is allowed to be behind the wheel of a car when they are under the influence. If you are inebriated, if you are drunk, if your mind is not alert, you will not be able to safely control a moving vehicle, and you can cause incredible harm to yourself as well as others. If we need to be alert and fully sober to drive well, how much more so to live well. Sobriety doesn’t simply mean we are not under the influence of alcohol, but that we are not controlled by anything other than our right minds and the Spirit of God. We all know what it’s like to be under the influence of a powerful desire—under the influence of lust, under the influence of pride, under the influence of greed, under the influence of selfishness, under the influence of laziness. When that happens, we make decisions we look back on and regret. Peter says, “Don’t let sin inebriate you!” We must be alert, fully sober, in our right minds, so that we can live the right way.

“Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming” (1 Peter 1:13). Second, Peter says we need a *focused hope*. If we are going to live holy lives, we need our minds set not only on the here and now, but on heaven, on eternity. Those who are wise financially don’t just pay their bills today; they invest for tomorrow. Those who plan on running a marathon don’t put their running shoes on for the first time the morning of the race; they train for months in advance to get ready for the big day. Jesus tells parable after parable of a master who goes away and gives his servants instructions. He says, “When I come back, it’s not going to be pretty for those who lived however they wanted to live, but it’s going to be really good for those who prepared for my return.” Jesus says in Revelation 22:12, “I am coming soon! My reward is with me.” How do we live holy lives? We set our hope on heaven and all the grace and gifts that will be given to us when Jesus returns.

“Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14). Third, Peter says we need a *clear break from former, ignorant behavior*. We’ve all had times when we’ve acted in ways that were unintelligent. Our behavior wasn’t necessarily malicious; we just didn’t know better. President George Washington received the best medical treatment available in the world 250 years ago. He had a throat infection, and his doctors, doing what they thought was right, drained 40% of the blood out of his body to “restore balance,” gave him medicine which induced vomiting and diarrhea to “cleanse” his body, created blisters on his skin to “draw out illness,” and gave him mercury, which was intended to reduce inflammation but is actually poison. It’s hard to blame the doctors from centuries ago—they didn’t know any better—but if a doctor did that today, he’d lose his medical license in a second!

Think about the science of running. A century ago, it was believed that drinking water during a long-distance run was counterproductive. During the marathon at the 1904 Olympics,

rather than water stations, they had brandy stations. Rather than drinking water, athletes would drink alcohol. They thought the buzz would help them athletically. Of course, we've discovered that alcohol increases dehydration, reduces coordination, and impairs oxygen delivery. Turns out electrolytes are better than hard liquor. You can't blame them for what they didn't know at the time, but you would never do that with what we know today. Peter is saying the same thing about the way we live. Grace does not excuse us to continue in ignorance; it summons us into the light. Now that you know Jesus, you can't live like you did before.

"Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15). The fourth step Peter gives us to live holy lives is the most powerful: *a fixed gaze on Jesus*. Peter says growing in holiness isn't about reading a rule book and meticulously following every direction; it's about coming to look, live, and love more like Jesus. Look at this inner life of Jesus—his life of prayer, his grounding in Scripture, his intimacy with the Father, his surrender to the Holy Spirit. Look at how that inner life flowed outward in his compassion for the hurting, his tenderness toward the weary, his love for the lost, his courage to speak truth, and his willingness to forgive those who wronged him. Jesus is the perfect picture of holiness, a life fully set apart for the glory of God. He said to any who would be his disciples, "Come, follow me" (Matthew 4:18). Don't just believe in me; follow in my footsteps and pattern your life after me. That's how we live a holy life.

Why Should We Live Holy Lives?

After Peter answers the questions, "What is holiness?" and "How do we live holy lives?", he ends this passage by answering perhaps the most crucial question of all: why should we live holy lives? He gives two clear, convincing reasons.

First, *we will experience an impartial judgment*. Peter communicates this to us in 1 Peter 1:17: "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear." Peter helps us with an image and understanding of God here that we tend to steer away from in our cultural moment. We love to think of God as our Father, and more specifically as a really loving father who delights in us—which he is. We celebrate that God is our Father and we celebrate that we are his beloved sons and daughters—which we are. But we tend to focus so much on the father aspect that we neglect the fact that God is also a judge. And he is not a judge who is soft on crime! He is not a judge who winks his eye at sin. He doesn't preside over a courtroom with no consequences, where the gavel never drops. There are teeth to his pronouncements. Peter encourages us to live holy lives by reminding us that there is coming a day when every one of us will stand before a holy God and everything we've ever done will be evaluated.

Scripture is so clear that we are saved by grace and judged by works. We are saved by God's grace and God's grace alone, not by anything we've done, but based on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Period. If you believe in Jesus, your name is in the Lamb's book of life, written there in the blood of Christ. That's what brings us into God's family for eternity. But there is

still a judgment. Judgment is not about whether you belong to Jesus—that was settled at the cross. It's about how you stewarded the life he redeemed.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Revelation 21:13 says, “Each person was judged according to what they had done.” Perhaps the clearest picture we have of this is in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

God's impartial judgment is seen like a fire. It sweeps though, and it burns up the wood, hay and straw, and they are gone, but the precious metal remains. Everyone who has the foundation of Jesus will be in heaven, and if the way you live your life withstands the test of judgment, you will receive a great reward in heaven. That is motivation toward a holy life.

I changed car insurance companies a few months ago. I signed up for a drive safe and save program. It tracks my every move—how often I accelerate, how often I speed, how abruptly I break, how often I open my phone when I drive. The numbers are the numbers! If I wanted to live a 100% transparent life, I could share my scores with you. I am not going to do that, but I could! That tracking app is not like our judicial system. It doesn't care what you look like, how much money you have, or how good a lawyer you can hire. It simply judges your driving patterns impartially. God is going to judge our lives without partiality. That should bring a reverent fear and encourage us to live holy lives.

There is a second reason given in our passage, even more compelling in my mind, for why we should live holy lives: *Jesus died to set us free from sin*. “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 ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19). To set us free from our former, empty way of life, Jesus paid the ultimate price. He didn't swipe a credit card for our salvation. He didn't stand at a distance and write a check. He descended from heaven to earth and was nailed on a cross. Our redemption came through his shed blood, his death on the tree. When we consider the extreme price of our redemption, it changes the way we live.

In the Middle Ages, groups of pirates from north Africa would raid villages in Southern Europe and take captives back to Africa as slaves. This happened to so many villages that the Catholic church established an order of priests known as the Mercedarians. Their only job was to take money from the church to Africa and purchase the freedom of the captives. This

order of priests not only took the usual vows when they entered the priesthood—vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—but they also took a fourth vow, the “vow of substitution.” If they didn’t have enough money to purchase the freedom of the captives, they would exchange themselves for the captives. They would become slaves so that the slaves could be set free. The most famous Mercedarian was Saint Serapion of Algiers. When he ran out of money to purchase captives, he traded himself and was later beaten and executed. Those he traded places with never forgot. Many placed their faith in Jesus, and others entered the Mercedarian order to go and set other captives free. No one should be able to walk away unchanged when someone dies in their place.

Jesus paid a price for you. He died on the cross for you. That must change the way you live. The blood of Christ has the weight to break the chains of alcohol, to break the chains of lust, to break the chains of greed, to break the chains of pride. His blood summons us and empowers us to live holy lives. Charles Spurgeon said, “If you trifle with sin, you trifle with the cross.” We don’t want to trifle with the cross by continuing in sin. We want to treasure the cross and live the holy lives Jesus came to offer us.

Because this passage ends with focusing on the worthiness of the blood of Jesus, we wanted to have an opportunity to worshipfully respond to what Jesus did for us. We are going to invite our worship team onto stage. After this song, we are going to receive communion together as a church family. If you haven’t already, you can make your way to one of the tables to get the Communion elements. We are going to sit, reflect on the truth in this beautiful song, and thank Jesus for the price he paid for us.