

2. A Holy Life

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[0 : 00] Now let's pray together. Come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

God our Father, we praise you for the gospel. The gospel that is for us, but not about us. The gospel that centers not on our futile and feeble efforts and our intermittent faith, but on the great faithfulness of your heart, on the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on the grace that has done for us what we could not possibly do for ourselves.

Father, we do not deserve your goodness, we do not deserve your love, and yet we rejoice in it. We rejoice in the grace that calls us from being the children of darkness to being the children of the Son of your love.

As we come this afternoon, Father, we come from our normal way of life. We come from busyness. We come from problems. We come from many situations to which we will return.

And we come and lay our hearts open before you to hear what you have to say to us. We have come for many different reasons, perhaps out of habit.

[1 : 23] Perhaps we are just passing and decided to come in. Perhaps a deep longing in our hearts to hear your word. But we thank you, Father. It is the living and abiding word of God.

The good news that is preached. And not simply someone's opinions. Not simply a philosophy or an idea. But something can change hearts and lives.

And we indeed pray that that will happen to us today. As we meet here, we pray for our world. Our world in all its confusion and perplexity.

A world where there is inequality. A world where there is suffering. A world where there is injustice and unholiness and sin and evil. A world that desperately needs the gospel.

And we pray, Lord, that into these situations, these complicated, difficult, trying situations, that the word of life will come. And will transform lives and indeed transform communities.

[2 : 25] And so as we come to hear your word, we ask indeed that your spirit will guide us. Your spirit will bless us. And that you will open your word to our hearts and minds.

And that you will open our hearts and minds to your word. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now, if you turn, please, to page 1014 in the Bibles.

And we are continuing in 1 Peter 1 and on into chapter 2. As I've said, this little series, I've taken the words indeed from 1 Peter 2, come to him.

This is what the gospel is about. It is coming to him. It's not coming about us or anything like that. It's coming to him. And we looked last week at the living hope.

And today it's a holy life. So we begin at chapter 1, verse 13. And we read on to chapter 2, verse 3. Therefore, says Peter, that's therefore because of the gospel, the living hope that's come to you, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded.

[3 : 39] Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.

But as he who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy.

And if you call on him as father, who judges impartially according to each one's needs, conduct yourself with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that 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, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, 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.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God, for all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass.

[5 : 10] The grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever, and this word is the good news that was preached to you. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Now, men, may God bless to us that reading from his word. I think one of the most unfortunate and most unhelpful descriptions of the Bible is to call it a rule book or a guidebook.

What I call the Reader's Digest view of the Bible. I don't get the Reader's Digest, but occasionally in a doctor or a dentist's waiting room, I'll pick it up and read it.

And you have articles like Ten Ways to Impress Your Boss, Five Ways to Improve Your Marriage, Fifteen Ways to Become Successful. Now, these are quite interesting articles often, and they often have good advice in them.

But never in my life have I met anyone whose life has been transformed as a result of reading these articles. They're simply words on the page.

[6 : 40] They have no power whatever to change people's lives. And that's the nature of a rule book. In your kitchen, you've got to have a magnificent collection of cookery books, and yet be incapable of producing a meal that anyone wants to eat.

You could know the highway code backwards, and be a dreadful driver. And so on. Rule books, guidebooks are useful, but they have no power in themselves.

They are certainly not, you will certainly not read them, as verse 23 says, Be born again through the living and abiding word of God. And I suspect some of you who look at my title, A Holy Life, your hearts will already be sinking.

My heart would be sinking if I were in the chairs rather than preaching. Because when I hear someone wants to talk to me about holiness, I assume they're going to tell me I'm not good enough.

I'm not working hard enough. And I'm going to feel, as I look around, am I the only sinner in the room? Because holiness so often is presented as something that we do.

[7 : 53] Something that belongs to us. Rather than something, look at the very first verse we read, verse 13, The grace that will be brought to you. Holiness is a gift of grace.

We are called to be holy, to be like God, because he has sent his spirit down from heaven. That's what the previous verses have said. And only by the work of that spirit will holiness happen.

We're living to please him, to be holy, because he is holy. Quoting from Leviticus in verse 16, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.

In other words, we become active participants in God's great plan of salvation. Not just bystanders. We become holy because we are his children.

You notice the word should doesn't feature here. Peter isn't saying you should be holy. Peter is saying God has made you holy. Be holy. And there are two great things, two great realities, which are going to make us, which already have made us holy, and which in our lives will continue to make us holy.

[9 : 08] The first is the blood of Christ, verses 13 to 21. Particularly verse 18. Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

In other words, what the blood of Christ does is it transforms us. It's very easy to imagine sometimes, particularly in nice, middle class, respectable areas, that what people need is not transformation, but education.

Obviously, I approve of education. It's a great thing. We need education. But education will not fundamentally change people's hearts and lives. Education very often can hide what people are really like.

What we need is transformation. And that's what is offered in the gospel, the precious blood of Christ, as opposed to the way of life.

Verse 14, as obedience should do, we conform to the passions of your former ignorance. You see, the gospel enlightens us. The passions of our former ignorance.

[10 : 29] And verse 18, that's called the futile ways inherited from your forefathers. In other words, the futile way of life, which simply means going with the flow, making no decisions, making no hard choices.

And our response to that is not to say, well, I really, really must do better. Our response is a delighted acceptance of the precious blood of Christ shed for us.

That's the difference between the gospel and religion. Religion says, I do good, therefore God accepts me. The gospel says, God accepts me by his grace and by the precious blood of Christ, and therefore I do good.

The one flows from the other. Now, just a couple of quick points about the precious blood of Christ. This is a densely packed passage. You could spend ages on this, but just two things.

First of all, this is not a desperate emergency measure on God's part. It wasn't that God came down to the Garden of Eden and said, well, they've made a mess of it.

[11 : 43] I'd better introduce something else. Because if that were the case, then we simply make God into somebody who's rather good at reacting to a crisis. This is not a desperate emergency measure.

The cross and the resurrection were planned before the worlds were made. Look at verse 20. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world. It was made manifest in these last times for your sake.

Before the worlds were made. Before a star shone in the sky. Before the dinosaurs roamed the earth. The cross was there in God's plan of salvation.

And that shows how much God cares for us, doesn't it? He didn't die for the stars. He died for you and me. He shed his precious blood for us.

And revealed and made manifest in those last times. Those last times are the times between the coming of Christ to Bethlehem and his coming again at the end of the age.

[12 : 49] Someone said, before ever there was a sinner on earth, there was a Savior in heaven. Who Jesus was from all eternity was revealed at the cross.

How much does God care for us? How much has God done for us? We need to look at the cross. That cross plan from all eternity.

For your sake. That's the first thing. It's not a desperate emergency measure. The second thing is, it's not something that God didn't plan for throughout history.

If you look at the, verse 19 again, like that of a lamb without, with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

See, the Old Testament was written for us. Not just for the people of the time. It was written for us. Books like Leviticus, a series of active parables of what Jesus was going to do.

[13 : 55] You won't believe me when I say Leviticus is one of the most exciting books in the Bible. But it is. Everywhere there is radioactive material.

Everywhere. Do not touch. This is dangerous. Do not go any further. This will kill you. All these kind of things. things. Because the holiness of God was such that people could not simply barge into his presence.

And when Jesus died, when Jesus died, the great thick curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The no entry signs were taken away and the way was blazed straight into the presence of God.

Jesus, who had no sin, became sin for us. All the death, all the hell, all the judgment that we deserve, he took upon himself.

So, how do we become holy? We don't become holy by saying I ought to do better. We become holy by, as Wesley says, a heart that's sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for me.

[15 : 13] And notice that Wesley says it's the heart. It's not anything superficial. It's the heart that is changed. So, the first thing that makes us holy is the blood of Christ.

You'll notice, of course, in verses 13 and 14, he says, prepare your minds, set your hope fully. We need to think through the implications of what Christ has done.

While it is a gift of grace, we need to accept that gift and use it. It's always quite hurtful if someone gives a gift and then perhaps if someone, if you give someone a gift and then perhaps you return to their house six months later and it's still lying on the city unopened.

That shows the gift has not really been accepted. And so, the gift of holiness is something we need to accept. And you'll notice, prepare your minds. A gospel, the gospel comes to the mind first, through the heart and then to the will.

Now, if it stops at the mind, of course, we just start thinking interesting ideas, spinning philosophies and theologies about the death of Christ. It simply comes to the heart and we feel all emotional and gooey, but neither alter our lives.

[16 : 33] It comes to our minds and what we grasp with our minds begins to change our hearts, the great, wonderful, life-changing truths. And they begin to change our lives.

Our lives must be holy because of the precious blood so freely shed for us. In that sense, life becomes like driving a car.

Now, you sit in the driving seat and you make, you almost do nothing, and yet the movements you make are absolutely essential. essential. But the power doesn't lie in me as the driver.

The power lies in the engine, if you like. And the engine that drives holiness is the precious blood of Christ. And the second thing, the second great agent in making us holy is the word of God.

The word of God which is imperishable. Look at verse 22. Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the life-giving and abiding word of God.

[17 : 51] And then he quotes from Isaiah, all flesh is like grass, showing that this is an eternal truth that stands throughout the centuries. When Isaiah wrote, it was a time of great danger.

The Assyrians were threatening the land. When Peter wrote, Rome was the dominant power, it was true in both times. It's true now the living and abiding word of God.

And as always, there are two sides. As in the precious blood of Christ, God gives that as a gift. Here in his love, not that we love God. He loved us and gave his son as the propitiation, the sacrifice for our sins.

And similarly, he gives his word. Because we did not invent it, human beings didn't invent it. God gives his word.

And what happens when that word is received. Verse 23, you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable. Now notice what the text is saying.

[18 : 56] The text is not saying the Bible saves us. It is perfectly possible to read the words of the Bible and remain unchanged. James tells us the demons believe and tremble.

What the Bible does is faithfully and fully point us to the Christ who does save us. And the only Christ who saves us is the biblical Christ.

As we read the word, as we think about it, as we meditate on it, meditation is nothing to do with mysticism and sitting in a field and among the morning dew and so on, meditation is thinking about what God has sent to us as we read his word, as we listen to it and as we obey it.

Then the word of God begins its work. And this is a work like a growing plant, isn't it? You plant the seed in the ground and there's life in it.

But just as we need to open our minds, open our hearts, open our lives to receive the precious blood of Christ, we should do the same for the word. It's perfectly possible to hear the word in the sense of being present when the words are spoken.

[20 : 12] Anyone who's brought up children knows that very well. Hear what I'm saying dear? Yes, dad. And of course, what she means is she was present when the words were spoken.

It doesn't have any effect on what she does. Now very often that's what happens when the word is preached. We don't do anything about it. We simply let it wash over us.

And you'll notice the metaphor that Peter uses in chapter two. He uses two metaphors. He's a metaphor of putting on clothes and putting away clothes.

Put away means put on these things and put off other clothes. And then he used the metaphor of drinking and of eating. There's a negative side. Get rid of.

Put away all malice and deceit. Put away the dirty clothes. Get them washed and put on new clothes. It's actually an important minor theme that runs through the Bible, the theme of clothes.

[21 : 10] It's not a major theme. Remember at the very beginning Adam and Eve pathetically tried to put on the clothes of good works and God clothes them with righteousness. And eventually we come to the great words of Paul in Romans.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. The words that led to the conversion of Augustine, a great Christian, in the early century. Put away all the things that are unreal.

Notice all these things refer to unreality, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. These kind of words are words about a world view that is not marked by reality.

Put it in a theological way. Don't live in la-la land, Peter is saying. Be real, be sincere, live in the real world.

Because all these things discourage and destroy, they are unholy. They have to do with pretense. Hypocrisy.

[22 : 19] Think about hypocrisy. Some people pretend to be holy. But they are the kinds of people who make you feel uncomfortable and uneasy. As if they were sanctified by vinegar.

You could not imagine going to them with a problem or crying on their shoulder. Envy. The kind of thing that looks down in contempt and so on, slander.

Say, we could go into all these, but we won't. But there is the positive. And the positive, here is the metaphor for change, it's like newborn babes long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up.

A hungry baby, a hungry young Christian, growing up to want solid food. And how do we grow up?

We grow up as the word of God dwells richly in us. The author of the letter to the Hebrews says to the people he's writing, you ought to be taking solid food now, and you're still like babies, you're still on baby food.

[23 : 23] Grow up, he says, grow up, and because you've tasted that the Lord is good. Develop a taste for the Lord and for his word.

So you see, be holy is not a stick to beat ourselves with. It opens up the door to enormous possibilities, to a new life. You see, the living hope and the holy life are not different.

It's not God does his bit in the living hope, and then we do our bit in the holy living. Rather, God gives us this living hope, and if that living hope truly grows in us, then we become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we do live a holy life. It's not like Peter is saying, live any way you like, do anything you like, think anything you like, of course not. What he's saying is, none of those things will ever truly take root in our hearts, will never truly be part of our character, unless we see them as gifts of grace.

And that's why he says, coming back as we finish to the verse where we began, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 42] As I finish, let me just say this, the revelation of Jesus Christ is given to us in his word. That word that leads us to him, that will never deceive us about him, that word is all we need for life and godliness in this world, as he says in his second letter.

But, when we meet Christ himself, as John says, then we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is, and that will be true holiness.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we know that holy living so often eludes us.

So often we try to create our own little schemes of what we think are holiness. Help us to luxuriate in your grace, to rejoice in the love that has found us.

Help us to be like hungry babies desiring your word, so that we may indeed show more fully the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[25 : 52] It is in his name we pray. Amen.