

For Pete's Sake
7-9-17
1 Peter 1:13-22

Welcome to the second week of our series, "For Pete's Sake." We are walking through 1st and 2nd Peter to see how we can grow in our walk with Jesus. As we begin this morning, I want you to think about what comes to mind when you think of the term holy. What comes to mind? It's not a term that we use a whole lot and often when we do, it isn't always in a good way right? For many people it's holy cow, or holy something else or holier-than-thou sort of thing. Maybe holy means a goody-two-shoes that you don't measure up. Some people here may even have been burnt by individuals who thought they were being holy. Or maybe, when you hear the term holy, you think of something incredibly reverential and maybe you go to a Mother Theresa or a Billy Graham. You might think of something that is perhaps constantly praying. Or maybe you just think of God and that he is holy, but outside of that holy and you don't connect. This morning as we read along in 1st Peter we are going to look at this concept of being holy and what Peter encourages to do to become holy.

Now the NLT begins this passage by saying, "prepare..." In the NLT the original word is translated prepare but, it is most often translated as "therefore." It means that whatever came before this passage is setting up what is about to come. If we were to gloss over that one word and simply run into the passage, we might hear this as simply a list of rules or commands that we need to keep. We'd be tempted to view it as a checklist and we will forget entirely the purpose behind these commands. And some of these commands are kind of brutal, such as: "Be holy in everything you do." In our time, we hear commands and we automatically feel a resistance to it. If we're told what to do, we immediately put up our walls and defenses even when we know in our hearts that it is good for us to listen. The reason is because we need a reason. We need to know why we should obey these commands. So, when we approach this passage we see at the very beginning this "therefore" and we realize that everything preceding it is the reason for whatever is to come, the motivation behind what's next.

So, what is that motivation? The motivation is that Jesus rose from the dead and is currently working on a new kingdom in this world and is also preparing one for us in the next world too. And Peter says we should do these things because of Jesus. Because of what Jesus did we should strive to be holy.

Our reason to be holy comes from Jesus.

Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. 1 Peter 1:13b

Knowing our motivation makes everything a little easier to understand and swallow doesn't it? We have been given an amazing gift: new life! And because of that gift we are called not to squander it by going back to those things that we did before. If we have been truly made new then we are called to be different from what we were. For Peter, being holy means being different than what we were before Jesus.

Now it isn't an easy, right. It doesn't come naturally does it? Peter says to us, "Be holy." If you're like me, you probably think to yourself, easier said than done. Peter knows it's not easy. He begins the passage saying that you have to be prepared for action and exercising self-control. In our terms, we might think about rolling up our sleeves. It is the idea that you are ready to get to work and you know that it is going to require some effort. Only the effort that Peter is talking about here is with your mind. It is about exercising self-control.

Being holy doesn't come easy.

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. 1 Peter 1:13a

Everything around us screams at us to keep us from accomplishing what Peter is saying. Even just the idea of exercising self-control isn't exactly looked at with much respect in our culture. Sure, we give lip service to self-control, but we often celebrate excess with food, and drink and all kinds of stuff. We look with admiration and envy on those who can choose can say no to something. Self-control often sounds too restricting in this world of excess. Peter is so adamant about our need to be prepared because the things he is saying are so difficult and its so easy be tempted away from holiness.

I think the problem that we often have when we approach this subject of holiness is that we have created a caricature of holiness. We don't really understand it. It is one of those things that when we see it, we can point it out...or at least we think we can. The actual definition of the word holy is merely to be "set apart, often for a reason."

Holy means being set apart for a reason.

¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. 1 Peter 1:15

The truth is though that we aren't even good at that. We lump the idea of being holy with being prudish or being a monk or never having fun or being isolated from everyone else. Yet that's not holiness. That's not what being holy is really about. We get the idea that something is sacred and so it is to be treated with a certain form of reverential respect. Yet the real concept here is simply that being holy is being different for a purpose. To be holy is to say to the world that there is a different way of living.

Living a holy life is about living differently for a reason.

¹⁴ So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. 1 Peter 1:14

Now what does it really mean to live differently? Because I think we can agree that simply being different isn't what Peter is talking about. He is talking about something deeper than that. Listen again to what he says in verse 13-14. This is different from the world isn't it? Think about it, we hope in the economy and our retirement plans. We hope in the housing market and that when we decide to sell our house we'll be able to make more money, or the opposite that when we go to buy we'll be able to save money. We hope that the Orioles or the Phillies pitching will finally come around... yes, I know some of our hopes are more ridiculous than others. We hope in individuals, we hope in organizations and all the while we are hoping in things that will eventually fail us. To live holy means to put our hope in Jesus alone.

Jesus says don't slip back into the old ways of hoping in things that you want or feel you need. Living the new life in Jesus means asking a deeper question than simply satisfying our desires: how can we live more fully into the new kingdom life? This means that we are thinking of others before we are thinking of ourselves. I know people who have for years lived a new life only to stumble once and then plummet back into their old way of living. Yet, I have also seen, how some people have been tempted and have instead sought a deeper relationship with God and have held strong instead.

Its not easy to live differently. In fact, Peter uses a phrase in this passage that helps us to see our role in this world with a powerful understanding. He says that we are "temporary residents." He uses a similar term in the opening of the letter. He says to those living as "foreigners." The words are similar and yet contrast importantly. You see the word "foreigner" refers to people who are not home or maybe even exiles.

Peter is saying that we live in a world that is hostile to who we really are if we're going to follow him. The term "closed countries" refers to countries where it is illegal to preach the gospel. There are countries around the world where it is dangerous to tell other people about Jesus. Peter is telling us that we are living in a world not our own. We are living as exiles in a world that is hostile to our beliefs, always have, always will.

So, the question is, how do we live in such a world? It's a reasonable question. Living holy lives means living a kingdom life. It means living the way Jesus lived and following his example

Living a holy life means living like Jesus.

²² You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. 1 Peter 1:22

What does it look like to live like Jesus? Jesus stood for justice. He stood for the outcast. He looked at people, saw their needs and he cared for them. He spent time teaching people and encouraging them. Jesus urged repentance among his followers and called them to a new life. I don't want to oversimplify this in the expression What would Jesus do? Yet to some degree this is true. How would Jesus treat the person at your office who has been struggling with work? It's easy to assume things about that person, that they're lazy or don't care, but perhaps if you talked with them you might begin to hear the truth behind the story. You might begin to see a person has been hurt and is trying to keep their head above water. Or maybe you and your spouse are arguing and you're baffled by why this is such a big deal. Dig under the surface and approach them in love. Jesus sought to restore relationships, so we are called to do the same. What about those opportunities to cut corners at work? Jesus modeled excellence at all times in private and public.

At this point you're probably saying, this sounds impossible, this sounds like a set of rules that I have to keep. The truth is it is impossible under your own power. If it is just a set of rules that you're meant to keep, you'll fail at it. But, if we become these holy people, it no longer becomes about keeping the rules, but about being a holy person it changes everything. It is a shift between doing and being. How do we do that? Peter says this [Read verse 18-21]. You see, it is

through Christ that we have been purchased. It is through Christ that we have been made new and it is through Christ that we are daily made more and more into his likeness. This is how we live a holy life. It is through the power of Christ in our lives and it is through his strength and mercy that we become who we were meant to be: Holy Children of God.

The power of Christ makes us holy.

²¹ Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. 1 Peter 1:21