

In the Land of our Sojourn: A Hope-Fueled Holiness

1 Peter 1:13-21

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on August 3, 2014

Introduction

- ❖ In the last few weeks we've been in the book of 1 Peter in a series we're calling "In the Land of our Sojourn". It's been about how to navigate our culture from the identity of an exile. That's how Peter describes a Christian. He calls us "*sojourners and exiles*" (2:11). Other translations use words like *strangers*, *aliens*, or *temporary residents*. The idea is that this world is not our home. It's the land of our sojourn, of our temporary stay.
 - Now the reason we chose to study 1 Peter is because we've been focusing this year on the idea of being a church that is *For the City*, and we've talked at length about engaging our city and about the posture we ought to take towards our culture.

- ❖ When we looked at Jeremiah 29, we considered three options for cultural engagement. Three attitudes to take towards the culture. On one end of the spectrum, we could **assimilate as natives**. We could fully embrace and endorse the dominant culture. We could fit right in. On the other end we could **withdraw as separatists**. We could take on a more antagonistic view and pull away into our own cultural ghettos.
 - But God has given us a third option. We could **serve as exiles-in-residence**. An idea that would've resonated with Peter. As an exile, it makes sense that a Christian shouldn't fit right in, but it doesn't mean we should pull away. **Instead, we can take on the posture of a resident alien who makes a home here but never forgets that this is not really home.**
 - In other words, settle down in the city but don't settle for the city. You reside in this country but your primary allegiance is to another. You're an exile-in-residence. You love your city of residence, pray for it, seek its welfare. But you never forget your real home is a city that is to come.

- ❖ That's what it means to live as a Christian on this side of our King's return. We live as sojourners, as strangers, as those who don't belong, who don't really fit in. Another way of putting it, using Peter's language, **we live as holy people trying to live holy lives.**
 - I know that sounds really arrogant to say. For many people, that kind of talk turns them off from Christianity. Maybe some of you are thinking, "*That's exactly my impression of Christians. They think they're holier-than-thou. They think they're better than everyone else.*" But that's not what I mean when I say Christians are holy people. I think we have a different understanding of what it means to be holy.

- ❖ It helps if we define the term biblically. And that's what I hope to do with our text. I've got three points. We're going to see the **pattern** of holiness that we're to strive after, the **pursuit** of holiness that we're on, and the **motives** for pursuing that holiness.

The Pattern of Holiness

- ❖ Let's begin by considering the pattern of holiness – the standard, the benchmark by which we'll be measured. What kind of holiness are we striving after? **Or better put, whose holiness are we striving after?** The answer is in v16, "*since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*" Now that's God speaking.

- ❖ *So whose holiness are we pursuing? **The Holiness of God.*** God is the pattern of our holiness. He's the standard-bearer. He's the benchmark. **The holiness of his life is the very pattern by which we base our lives.** It's a holiness is first revealed to us in the book of Leviticus. Peter quotes the book in v16. There are actually four places in Leviticus where God says, in effect, to "*be holy as I am holy.*" (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26)
 - Now the Hebrew word for holy is *qadowsh*. It means to cut or cut off or to separate. But to make something holy means more than just separating it. It means setting it apart from everything else as different, as unique. It's saying this thing or this person is a cut above the rest.

- ❖ **So when we call God *holy*, we're basically saying that he is an infinite cut above the rest of creation.** Because he is our Creator. He's not just the best of us. He's in a class of his own. That's what it means for God to be holy.
 - I think there's a tendency to treat holiness as just one of God's many attributes. God is love. God is powerful. God is wise. God is holy. But that's not how it's used in Scripture. Holiness is really just a synonym for his deity. **Holiness describes the Godness of God.** Holiness is what makes God God. It's his Godness.
 - So to call God *holy* is to say that all of his attributes are an infinite cut above ours. His is a holy love, a holy power, a holy wisdom. He's not just at the top of the scale in these attributes in comparison to us. God is off the scale. He's incomparable. He's matchless. That's what it means for God to be holy.

- ❖ ***Who is like God?*** That's a rhetorical question that rings throughout the OT (Ex. 15:11; cf. 1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kg. 8:23; 2 Chr. 6:14; Jer. 10:6). Which, by the way, if your name is Michael, that's what it means. *Mī khā'ēl*. Who is like (*el*) God? So the next time a guy introduces himself to you as Michael, you answer him, "*No one!*" No one is like our God. He is utterly separate. He is infinitely and transcendently set apart from the rest of us.

The Pursuit of Holiness

- ❖ *But if that's what it means for God to be holy, then what does that mean for us to be holy? **What about the holiness of Christians?** Are we to be infinitely and transcendently set apart from the rest of society?* Of course not, by definition as Creator, only God is holy in that sense. Yet when we talk about ourselves being holy or pursuing holiness, it still carries the sense of being separate and set apart.
 - When it comes to our holiness, Peter helpfully defines it in vv14-15. "*¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*".

- ❖ There are three things we can say about the Christian's holiness. **1) Our holiness proceeds from our new identity as God's children.** Notice that before we're given the command to be holy, we're addressed as "*obedient children*". Back in chapter 1:3, Peter alluded to our new birth, when we were born again. When you became a Christian, at that moment, you were reborn into a new family with God as your Father and you as his child.

- ❖ Now the principle goes like this: **A Holy Father begets holy children.** If God your Father is holy, then you – by virtue of being his child – will grow up to be holy. Like Father, like son (or daughter). Your holiness proceeds from your identity as a child of God.
 - Now the implications of this principle are huge. **It means you don't obey the command to be holy as a means of entering God's family.** You don't pursue holiness because you think that's how you become a child of God. Rather it's only because God, in his grace, has caused you to be born again as his child, that you even *want to* and are *able to* pursue holiness.

- ❖ Peter reinforces this point when he mentions how **God called us to himself.** Notice those words in v15, "*he who called you is holy.*" **Now you have to realize that this calling is more than just an invitation. It's an act of creation.** When God speaks, things are created. Light comes out of darkness. Life is created out of death.
 - So at your conversion, when God spoke and called you to himself, you became a new creation. And then, and only then, does he command your holiness. **His calling always precedes his command to be holy.** The calling comes before the command. That specific order is all-important because that's the gospel of grace.
 - You don't have to achieve a level of holiness before you can feel comfortable calling yourself a Christian. You're only a Christian because God has called you. By his grace, he set you apart. You're positionally holy and now you can become progressively holy. You can be holy as he who first called you is holy.

- ❖ So that's the first thing we learn about our holiness – that it's derivative of our identity as God's children. **2) Our holiness encompasses the whole of our lives.** Notice how Peter says that just "*as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.*"
 - For Peter's readers, being holy doesn't just mean now you sacrifice to the Christian God when you used to sacrifice to pagan gods. It doesn't just mean to practice your religion differently. It means to live your entire life differently. You're not holy just because you go to church instead of temple or a mosque or instead of just sleeping in.
 - **The pursuit of holiness can't be confined to just what you do on Sundays, to just your spiritual life.** It encompasses your whole life, every relationship, every responsibility, every priority, every passion. To be holy means setting all of that apart for God. It's not just how you spend Sunday mornings that should distinguish you from the world. It's really how you live your whole life.

- ❖ That leads to the third thing we learn. **3) Our holiness distinguishes us from the passions and desires of this world.** I see this in v14 when Peter commands us to "*not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.*" That means be holy in the sense of living differently from the culture you once so freely participated in and identified with *before* you were called.
 - In other words, do not conform to the standards and patterns of this world. Be different. Stand out from the culture. Distinguish yourself. Be holy.

- ❖ **Now at this point you might still argue that Christians really just mean "be better than everyone else"**. Be holier-than-thou. Be better behaved. Be more put together. Be smarter and wiser. *Isn't that what Christians really mean when they say they're trying to be holy?* Again I think we have a different understanding of what it means to be holy.
- ❖ The other day I was watching a re-run of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Have you seen it? If not, I'm going to ruin it for you. As you know, in all of his movies, Indie is always looking for some ancient relic. In this one, he's looking for the Holy Grail.
 - Legend says the Holy Grail is the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper. His very lips touched this cup, and legend goes on to say that Joseph of Arimathea used the same cup to catch the blood of Jesus as he died on the cross. So some people believed that this lost Grail could grant mystical powers or eternal life to whoever drank from it.
- ❖ So in one of the last scenes, Indie is in the vault where the Grail is being guarded. It's in a room completely filled with cups – with ornate, shiny, golden goblets and chalices. Indie is competing with this bad guy who goes first and tries to identify the Grail. The guy picks out the shiniest, prettiest cup with the most jewels on it, thinking this must be it. But when he drinks out of it, he dies. He chose poorly.
 - But Indie looks around the room and out of all the fancy cups he pulls out this old, dusty, wooden cup. It's not impressive at all, but it is different than all the rest. He takes that cup, drinks out of it, and lives. He got it right! He chose the Holy Grail.
- ❖ **The point is that our understanding of what it means to be holy can be very different.** We can all agree that the word *holy* means to be set apart, but we still have very different concepts of holiness.
 - The antagonist in the movie judged holiness by appearances. So he picked the cup that looked the prettiest, that was set apart by its external beauty. And he was wrong. **The Holy Grail was holy (set apart) not because of what it looked like but because of who used it.** There was nothing special in the wood of that dusty cup, but there was something special in the man who originally drank from it.
- ❖ Holiness is not about looking great on the outside. So when I say Christians are holy, I don't mean that our lives look so put together and are so outwardly attractive. In trying to be holy, we're not trying to look better or be better than everyone else. That's not what holiness is about. **Holiness about being set apart for service to a Holy God.**
- ❖ Letting God use us for his purposes – just as Jesus used that grail – that is being holy. **That's what it means to be holy – to be wholly available to God.** So to pursue holiness means you're striving – you're making every effort – to give every area of your life over to God. You're fighting your selfishness, that sinful tendency to hold back and keep *to* yourself and *for* yourself certain aspects of your life.

- ❖ **A holy man or holy woman is someone who is taking every priority, every passion, every relationship, every responsibility and consecrating all of it to God, directing all of it towards him.** If you're committed to that, then your life will certainly look different than your nonChristians neighbors. You'll be set apart. You'll be holy just like that Grail.
 - **That means your life may not be outwardly impressive. But you're still holy if your life belongs to God and is being used by him.** That's what made the Grail holy and that's what will make you holy.

The Motives for Holiness

- ❖ So we've considered the pattern of holiness and the pursuit of holiness, let's look at three motives for holiness. The three are hope, fear, and blood. First, hope. **1) Our pursuit of holiness is to be fueled by hope.** I see this in v13. *"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."*
- ❖ So this is Peter's thinking in v13 – In the next few verses, I'm going to call you to a life of holiness. I'm going to call you to pursue a life that will set you apart from the rest of society. That's going to make things hard. You'll be misunderstood and marginalized. You'll suffer insults and face trials. You'll be treated as a stranger and exile.
 - *Therefore*, you need to set your hope on God's grace to you. **You won't have the resolve to make the hard ethical choices that you'll soon face unless your hope is set on the grace that is yours and will be yours in Christ Jesus.** So set your hope fully on that grace and let that hope fuel your pursuit of holiness.
- ❖ *But how do you do that? How do you set your hope on grace?* Peter tells us how. By *"preparing your minds for action"*. **Literally, he says to gird up the loins of your mind.** Pastor Fred explained last week that "gird up your loins" is an OT expression for "prepare yourself". Get yourself ready for action. Men would literally gird up (tuck up) their long robes into their belts in order to run or battle or just do some serious work. It's like how we say, "roll up your sleeves". Roll up the sleeves of your mind.
 - **That means prepare your mind to do some serious thinking.** Setting your hope on God's future grace is not just wishful thinking. It calls for disciplined, clear, sober thinking. You have to be *"sober-minded"*.
- ❖ It comes down to this: **If you want to advance in holiness, then you need to strengthen your hope in God's grace to you, and that happens when you are consistently, in a disciplined manner, filling and engaging your mind with the truth of Scripture.** Because it's in Scripture that you encounter the truth of the gospel of grace.
 - Now just reading your Bible every day doesn't make you more holy. But if you read your Bible every day while thinking soberly over the theme of God's grace to you found from cover to cover, then your hope will abound and so will your holiness.

- ❖ ***Did you really think you would grow in holiness if you were undisciplined in the Word?***
Any progress in holiness calls for disciplined time reading the Word. Not just to fill your head with bible knowledge but to fill your heart with hope in the grace that's ours in Christ.
- ❖ So the first motive in our pursuit of holiness is hope, the second is fear. **2) Our holiness is spurred on by fear.** Now you might be thinking that doesn't sound right but stick with me. Look at v17, "*And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile*". So we just saw how hope in God's grace is a motive to live holy lives. Well it seems, in a seemingly paradoxical way, so is fear.
- ❖ **As long as we're in exile, in the land of our sojourn, the fear of God should mark our lives and be motivation to live holy lives.** *We ought* to fear God. But hear me out: There's a huge difference between the fear of a *sinful rebel* standing before a Holy Judge and the fear of a *sinning child* standing before her Holy Father who judges impartially.
 - A sinful rebel standing before a Holy Judge fears pure punishment and condemnation. **But a child-who-has-sinned standing before her Father only has to fear discipline and correction.** You can call them both fear but we know the difference. It's that second kind of fear – the fear a child has for her loving and just Father – that ought to spur on our holiness while in the land of our sojourn.
- ❖ So it's really not a paradox. **We can all grasp the idea of fatherhood and fear going together.** I want my daughter to know me as a loving father who's always willing to play with her and have fun with her. But I still want her to have a healthy fear of me. I don't want her to just know me as a friend. You don't fear your friends. I'm her father and I still want her to have a reverent fear towards me.
- ❖ But I realize, for some, the experience with your earthly father has been or currently is not a reverent fear but just downright terrifying. Your father scares you. And so you have a hard time relating to God as Father, especially when verses like this call you to fear him.
 - But remember what we said about God's holiness. Don't just put him on the top of the scale in your understanding of "father". As a Holy Father, he's completely off the scale. **God is a Father above any father you can imagine.** His love is completely pure and unconditional. His love is absolutely faithful and just.
- ❖ We grieve with you if you're just plain fearful of your earthly father. As a church, we're here to advocate for you, to stand with you, to protect you. **But the point is you shouldn't allow the unholiness of your earthly father to limit your experience of the Fatherhood of God.**
 - I encourage you to commit to praying every day this week the first line of the Lord's Prayer. "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*" Ask God to hallow his name, to hallow himself. That means to make himself holy in your eyes. **Once you come to see that he's off the scale, you're freed to relate to him as he is unfettered by the unholiness of the relationships you have on earth.**

- ❖ So we have hope and fear motivating our pursuit of holiness. Lastly, we have blood. **3) Blood is the third motive for our holiness.** Notice the transition between vv17-18. "*Conduct yourselves with fear . . . ¹⁸knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*"
 - This reinforces our point that the fear that should mark our lives is not a fear of losing our salvation, the fear of being condemned to hell. We're to conduct ourselves with fear *knowing* that we've been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ.

- ❖ This idea of a ransom had nothing to do with kidnappers in Peter's day. It had to do with slavery. In their culture, a slave could be freed by paying a ransom price of silver or gold to the temple of a god (a percentage would go to the slave owner). The former slave would then be considered freed from the owner, but now he belongs to that god. He's a slave to that god. Because the god ransomed him.
 - **Peter's point is that Christians have been purchased by the blood of Christ that he shed on the cross when he died for our sins.** He ransomed us. So we're no longer slaves to sin and death. Now we're slaves to Christ. We belong to him.
 - **This is why Christians pursue holiness, why we strive to be wholly available to Jesus, because we were bought by blood.** We belong to him.

- ❖ Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 6, "*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*" (6:19-20). So why be holy? Why consecrate your body, your soul, your life all to the glory of God? Because of the blood. With the precious blood of Christ you were bought. You are not your own anymore.
 - If you call yourself a Christian, you have to ask: ***In what ways do you still behave as if you're still your own?*** What aspects of your life have you been keeping to yourself? What part of your life do you need to sanctify, to set apart, to God?

- ❖ **Students**, think about what it means for you to be holy. We usually think holiness for a student just means you don't cheat. You do your work with integrity. Yes that's true but, on a deeper level, holiness means you have set apart your grades, your achievements, your ambitions all for God to use. Everything belongs to him. Your studies and efforts are aimed at glorifying his name and not your own.
 - If you're holy in that sense, then of course you won't cheat. Of course you'll take your exams and write your papers with integrity. Because you're doing it all in the service of God and not just for yourself anymore.

- ❖ **Single people**, what does holiness look like for you? Abstaining from sexual immorality? Refraining from all sexual activity before marriage? That's what we typically think and sure that's true, but your holiness goes much deeper than that.
 - Holiness means setting apart your body, your sexuality, your relationships all to the service of God, knowing that they are not your own, that you've been bought with a price. So if you're holy in that sense, then purity and abstinence are natural outflows.

- ❖ **Married people / parents**, your holiness doesn't require your marriage or your family life to be perfectly put together and the model of love and harmony. No, your marriage is holy, your family life is holy, when you've set apart those relationship to the service of God.
 - In that sense, your marriage and your family will naturally stand out. Because the priorities and passions in you home will be subjected to and shaped by God and his holiness. That's how your family will be set apart.

- ❖ ***So friends, what can you do, even this week, to grow a step further in holiness?*** What in your life do you need to set apart for God? Perhaps for some, you'll need to start with your own heart. Perhaps today is the day you put your faith in the blood of Jesus to cover your sins and to ransom you into relationship and service to God his Father.