



What is your reaction to this video prayer to be holy? Does the prayer inspire you? Does it inspire you to want to reflect God's holiness? Does the prayer inspire you to let others see the holiness of God working in you? Or did you have a different reaction to this video? Did it create tension or a conflict in you? You might be thinking, "yes, this video reminds me of my call to holiness, but it also reminds me of my long journey of failure to live a holy life. And, thanks for reminding me of my ongoing failures."

Some of us today might be saying, "Not only have I fallen short, I continue to fall short." Some of us today might be asking, "Why can't I overcome this vice in my life? Why do I feel like Paul when he said in Romans 7, 'For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.'?" For many of us, when we are challenged to be holy we don't feel inspired, we feel discouraged. We feel like losers in our battles against the flesh. We feel ashamed and we self-talk we are bad Christians unworthy of God's love and grace. We feel weak and useless to God to carry out his great purposes. We feel like hypocrites and live in fear that someday the atrocious sins we hate that live in us might be revealed for others to see.

Maybe this idea of personal holiness stirs cynicism in some of you. Thoughts like, "I've been a Christian for many years now, and I have accepted that there are fleshly desires that lead to sinful thoughts and actions in my life that are just not going away. They may go away for someone else, but they keep rearing up in me and I have no hope that they will ever be tamed."

Remember that child-like faith you once had? Remember that hopeful optimism you used to have when you prayed for personal holiness? Where is that tender heart now? Has it been hardened? Do you find that you justify behaviors you do that you used to find inappropriate?

Our text this morning is an exhortation from Peter to live as God intends in the here and now. Peter is speaking to Christians who live as exiles in a world that isn't governed by the Laws of God. They live in a world governed by any worldly philosophy that is opposed to the Law of God. As we saw last week, Peter wrote this letter to encourage the believers in Asia Minor who are suffering. He is writing to Christians who are suffering and know deep down that because they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, they had become like aliens in a foreign land. Peter wrote to Christians who are suffering because they have been in a battle to live out God's values in a world that couldn't care less about God's values.

So in verses 1-12 Peter builds a case that these suffering Christians have a reason to celebrate because they have been given an eternal hope. He says because of God's great mercy they now have been given salvation. He reminded us that we are elected by God to be his children; we too have been born again into a living hope and handed an imperishable and unfading spiritual inheritance. And if that isn't enough to be hopeful, Peter goes on to tell them that God loves them and abides in them and that he will never leave them or stop growing them. Peter especially encourages those of us who endure suffering of all kinds by following Jesus. He tells us that there is a greater purpose to this suffering. This greater purpose is to build in us a proven faith, a faith that undergoes refining to become something strong and beautiful, all for God's glory.

Verses 1-12 are a cause to celebrate our new identity in Christ that came because of our salvation. This is a letter of comfort, but it is not **just** a letter of comfort. Even in times of suffering, God calls us to give ourselves to his plan and purpose. I think most of us know all too well that when we are suffering, the most natural thing for us is to become too self-oriented, too self-focused, to have "I am a victim" as our theme song. When we are living in the harsh realities of a fallen world, we are tempted to forget about others and think only about ourselves. Maybe your harsh reality is a health crisis, maybe a financial challenge, maybe you have lost a friend, or you are trying to parent a rebellious child, or a marriage crisis. It can become all-consuming. Maybe it's being marginalized or even persecuted because you stand up publicly for your faith in Christ. I don't know about you, but when I allow something that is causing me to suffer dominate me, the greater my suffering seems to become.

So the call this morning is to not just see 1 Peter as a letter of comfort; these verses beginning in verse 13 are marching orders for holy living in the here and now. And this is good not just because it gives glory to God; this is good not just because of the people we can help in the here and now when we are obedient to God, but this is also good for us. In verse 13, Peter says because of your salvation, I will now show you how you really can live as I intend you to live in the here and now. Peter is saying, to all of us who struggle to live holy lives, lay aside your past failures. Lay aside your cynicism. Lay aside your shame. Lay aside your justifications and your self-condemnation and breath in this truth.

We Fix Our Hope on the Future Grace

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 (1 Peter 1:13).

When we see the word “therefore” we should always ask the question, “What is the therefore there for?” The idea is that because of that great salvation blessing, we are to alert our minds. The idea here is to engage your minds vigorously. The picture of us “rolling up your sleeves and get to work” fits well. Peter says before God’s grace is fully revealed when he returns again, get ready, get prepared in the here and now to respond with instant obedience in each step that unfolds in your life.

He says be fully sober. The idea here is not just stay away from drunkenness, but more the idea of not letting your mind wander away from this Jesus who saved you. It’s a present tense: continue to remain fully sober, continue to be full of self-control. Be alert to the spiritual realities around you. Recognize the temptations, the false teachings, the devil’s ways of deceiving, those other laws that entice you away from God’s law.

These ideas of staying alert and fully sober lead up the main point: In the here and now set your hope on the future grace brought to us when Christ comes again. This “set your hope” isn’t a wishful thinking upon a star. This isn’t just something we daydream about happening. This is a very strong hope. For us it means to let the certain reality of Christ’s return reorder our priorities while we live in this fallen world. Let this certain reality of Christ’s return shape our actions in the here and now.

Because we now know the great truths about our salvation, we can in the here and now visualize ourselves on a path leading to an incredible heavenly reward. The fact that our salvation, and with that the riches of our spiritual inheritance locked into an ironclad eternal trust, we can be about our Father’s business in the here and now, letting faith, hope, love and obedience characterize who we live. Ruben Alves said, “Hope is hearing the melody of the future. Faith is to dance to it.”

Last year Julie and I celebrated our thirtieth wedding anniversary in Hawaii. It was a big deal, very special. This year was our thirty-first. We couldn’t justify something like Hawaii for Number 31, so instead we went to a local movie theater with some friends and saw *La La Land*. I hadn’t been to a movie theater in quite some time. I forgot how functional and plain-looking the inside of our theaters are. You buy your ticket and go stand in line to buy popcorn, candy and a drink for more money than a monthly gym membership and you go into a very plain room and sit in a comfortable chair.

Julie and I particularly enjoy movies that are older than we are. And we enjoy seeing movies at the Stanford Theater in Palo Alto. In fact on Friday they were showing a Hitchcock movie and if

it’s Hitch, we’re there! The Stanford Theater was built in 1925. If you haven’t been there it’s so impressive looking. I read this week that during the great depression of the 1930’s these kinds of movie houses were built as amazing show places and that the more grand they looked the better. It doesn’t get better than a guy playing a pipe organ rising up from below the stage! You have no trouble finding seats. These kinds of theaters were designed to offer a transition from the grind of daily life. Theater architects wanted moviegoers to feel a sense of anticipation for what was coming next. Vaulted ceilings, artwork fit for a museum, tapestries, beautiful light fixtures were all intentional props to give customers a sneak peak of what they could expect when the lights went down and the movie started. During the Depression, movies offered people a chance to escape loneliness and fear, bringing strangers together for a moment of beauty and hope.

I like to picture the body of Christ like those classic theaters. God has called us to give the world a sense of anticipation of another world—not an imaginary film world, but a real world filled with God’s glory. When we fix our hope on the future grace of Christ’s return, we are given assurance and peace in the here and now that strengthens us to obey our marching orders: Stay alert, be sober and respond with obedience and you will help people catch the vision that there is something more in the future, beyond the grind of living in this broken world.

Our living as God intends us to live in the here and now should offer the world the beautiful alternative. So that leads to our second point—and it couldn’t be plainer—to live as God intends in the here and now.

We Live Holy Lives

As obedient children, 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”(verses 14-16).

Peter is saying, pattern your holiness after God’s holiness. Literally, as it is written in the Law of God from the Book of Leviticus, Chapter 19, *“be holy in all you do.”* It speaks to a pattern of life that affects every aspect of my public and private life.

A reason Peter gives for being holy is simply that it is written in the word of God. It’s saying there are actual moral absolutes and moral truths that transcend time and cultural standards in history. And God delights in these things that reflect his moral character and God hates what is contrary to his character. Some of us may be looking at this and be thinking, “No kidding. I know this already. The problem is I just can’t live a holy life. I can’t not conform to the pattern of this world. I keep failing. I am drowning here and the best you can do for me is describe the color of the water.” For those of us who struggle with holiness, can I see a show of hands? So for all of us, personal holiness in the here and

now is an outgrowth of not only avoiding outward sin, but also growing a delight for God as an obedient child imitates his good, good father, as a child who learns and then loves to delight in what his father delights in. We see King David began to understand this when we read his words from Psalm 1, "*I now delight in the law of God in my inner most being.*"

I used to read the word of God to just get to know the word of God better. But in my journey with Christ and my personal struggle with holiness, I needed to learn that I am to read the word of God to get to know God better. To get to know his heart for me, his church, the nations, the cities, his truth that brings freedom and the joy of being able to be in his presence.

But look at what Peter said in verse 14. In our former life, we were ignorant of Christ, we had no hope, we were dead. We may have tried to live morally and follow the law, but we always fell short. As Paul said in Romans (this is actually the Dan Reid paraphrase of what Paul said), "I did a pretty good job following the law. I didn't commit adultery, I honored my parents, I didn't steal, but I did have that problem with coveting. I was a coveter." He followed the law pretty well but he realized that his pretty good morals couldn't save him. Paul tried to follow the law but he didn't love the law. Paul didn't have the capacity to love the law because he didn't have a relationship with Christ until Christ met him on the road to Damascus, and then everything changed for him. We can't live holy lives in the here and now until we have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Peter is saying we are not ignorant any more. Because of God's mercy we are different beings. These evil desires can still remain, but they no longer define us. They no longer own us. We have become God's children. The Holy Spirit and that power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us, and the enslaving power of these evil desires has been broken, the ruling and dominating forces of sin are defeated. God has made it possible for us as exiles to be set apart from our surrounding culture and align with Jesus Christ to live as God intends in the here and now. Holy living isn't something to brush over quickly. Look at verse 17. It's sobering. Peter says in verse 17, in the here and now, when we live as God intends,

We Respect Our Heavenly Father as the Righteous Judge

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear (v. 17).

Reverent fear is not living in the fear of final judgment. It is the fear of disappointing the one who loves us. It's a fear hurting the one who laid down his life for us because we were not obedient. It's having respect for a loving father's discipline to correct us, refine us, even boil us if needed to remove the impurities to make us holy.

I recently spoke with a young man who really messed up and was receiving the heavy hand of God as judge over his life. He is responding in a healthy way. He is seeing that this was God refining him, and through this he has changed his life, entered into accountability by becoming fully integrated into his church community. He sees this looking back as God actually protecting him and keeping him from going farther down a dark road, and that what he was missing was an intimate relationship with his Heavenly father and strong men in his life. He was now fearing God and as a result he didn't fear anything else anymore. Oswald Chambers said, "It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics....The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else." (Printed from *Wisdom in a Time of War*)

Julie and I can remember enjoying our neighbors and neighborhood get-togethers over the years. When our kids were young we had block parties and evening bonfires while the kids played around us. But there were several times when we were very obviously not invited to some neighborhood parties. I remember one specific time when I was out in my front yard trimming my roses on my cul de sac and three neighbor couples walked past me and headed to another neighbor's party. I knew all of them and it was awkward for them and me. This wasn't going to be a party where kids were welcome and we were actually great not to go, but to not be asked and to think that our presence would make them uncomfortable was kind of hard at the time. We felt rejected, disappointed, and had to re-think how we can make a difference in their lives.

I remember hearing from my kids being singled out by some classmates, or have others apologize to them for their bad language because their dad was a pastor. Awkward for them, but if we fear God, we fear nothing else.

So here are the things God searches for in us. He looks to see that we respond to these challenges in reverent fear even under tremendous peer pressure. Even though we may truly be hurt, by living as God intends in the here and now, we must stay close to the one who showed us love and grace, and in turn show love and grace to those friends and neighbors and co-workers that God brings into our lives. As tempting as it is to back away from them and fear the situation, God says don't fear, stay strong. These are the things I search for in the family of God on judgment day.

Finally, I see these next verses as the climax of this passage. The gospel is the reason we can receive our marching orders and live as God intends in the here and now.

We Know the Gospel Sets Us Free to Live as God Intends

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 (verses 18–21).

Why would Peter end this section of scripture with the gospel? Because without the Gospel, without accepting the good news of Jesus Christ we can't possibly live as God intends in the here and now. Some of us are familiar with the life of Paul the apostle. Before Paul accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, he considered himself a proud pretty good law abiding Pharisee. In fact he referred to himself humbly as a Pharisee of Pharisees. But when Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus, he saw himself differently. He saw himself as a chief sinner among sinners. He realized that whenever he read Leviticus 19, "*Be Holy because I am Holy,*" it didn't make him more holy. It actually made him aware of how unholy he was. When Paul received salvation from Christ, he realized that without Christ to redeem him, he had been fighting a war he could not win. And Peter tells us here that for us to be born into a living hope in Christ, and to live as God intends in the here and now, there has to be a sacrificial death.

Looking back, I now know that before Christ saved me, when it came to living a holy life, I was fighting a war that I could not win. The power of sin and death hadn't been broken in my life until I accepted that Jesus died for my sins. But now because of God's mercy I am a new person. The gospel changes everything. That power of those evil desires that pull at me, don't own me anymore. The sin that defined me, accused me, made me dead spiritually was put on Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "God made him become sin on the cross." God poured out his wrath against sin on his Son Jesus Christ. God punished Jesus for all my wrongs. And he did all of this because he is merciful to me. I had nothing to contribute to my new life in Christ.

So what happened? The minute—better yet, the second—I trusted that Christ died for my sins, the Holy Spirit came into me. God's spirit took up residence in me. Then the Spirit wrote his law on my heart. The purpose of the law is not to show me where I fall short; I already know that. The only one who didn't

ever fall short is Jesus Christ. So the law now becomes a way to please the one who saved me and to please the one who wants an intimate relationship with me.

Let me tell you about one of my favorite verses. The Apostle Paul wrote this from his personal experience as an expert on the law. "*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*" (Gal. 5:18). Because I am born again into a living hope, the Spirit now leads me. The Law is no longer a burden that I must try harder to follow and still fall short. Now as a Christian I am to see the law differently. I have a relationship with God. He has extended to me open arms welcoming me to delight in him and delight in his law.

Even though sometimes we pull back from him and his law, things are different because God is with you. Have you noticed that the sin you once enjoyed before Christ isn't as enjoyable? Those songs you used to love on the radio and those movies you thought were so cool are now kind of creepy. That is because you have been changed.

Now, for me to live as God intends in the here and now, I'm not obsessing about obeying the law. I am obsessing about delighting in the law. David said in Psalm 1, "*Blessed is the one who does not walk in the step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD and who meditates on his law day and night.*"

Do you see what he did for you? Do you see it yet? Do you see what kind of relationship he wants with you? If you don't see it you will never be able to delight in God. You will never understand that it's God's mercy and grace demonstrated in the gospel that will change your life. But if you do see it and you run to it and you love God and delight in his Law, his Word, you can live a life that God intended in the here and now.

To any of us who are growing weak from the effects of this harsh reality of life in a fallen world.... to any of us who feel defeated by sin.... get to know this Jesus who saved you and delight in his Word. Because of the gospel, you are born into a living hope and you no longer fight a war you cannot win; you fight a war you will not lose. So before you leave this place today celebrate that you are alive in Christ and go forth into your world in such a way that the world around you sees a holiness from God alive in you in the here and now.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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