

IRREPRESSIBLE HOPE

III. “Hope That Purifies”

4-20-08
Ken Peterson

1 Peter 1:1-2; 13-2:3

TEXT: *...let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life,
a life energetic and blazing with holiness.*

1 Pet. 1:15, The Msg.

INTRODUCTION

I have fond memories of hiking in the mountains of Glacier Park in my younger years, and after a long, difficult ascent that left me hot and thirsty, I'd come across a rushing stream with pure, cold water. What pleasure to just lay down on my stomach, put my face in the water and drink deeply. I still remember the wonderful, satisfying taste. Nothing could be better it seemed. Then, I began finding out about a nasty little invisible parasite that could be present even in seemingly the most pure-looking water— giardia. The damage it could do to your intestinal system was intimidating. After learning about that and reading of the difficulties and sometimes major complications of those who had been infected, those clear mountain streams had to now be treated as a dangerous temptation. Now we had to pack all our water or use those disgusting iodine tablets that killed the giardia and bacteria, but made the water taste like medicine. Of course now they have sophisticated filters you can pack with you that are fine enough to filter-out any giardia, but we didn't have those in the time I'm referring to.

The danger wasn't anything I could see. But the truth scientists had uncovered was right and proven and I believed. Plus, I had the witness of friends who had suffered from giardia's effects, and that reinforced my resolve to not drink the clear, seemingly pure water from that rushing mountain stream. So, no matter how good it looked, how tempting, and right it felt to just drink deeply that delicious water, I had to keep reminding myself that it contained hidden danger. And, to make it even more complicated, the effect wasn't immediate. Giardia's disastrous effects in the intestines usually manifested about two weeks later.

Sin is often like the hidden giardia in those mountain streams. We may not see the danger. We think, “In this case, it will be okay.” But a statement I've shared with you before (and I'm not sure where I heard it) that I want you to always keep fresh in your minds is:

“Sin will always take you further than you wanted to go;
keep you longer than you wanted to stay;
and cost you more than you wanted to pay.”

In our Scripture this morning, Peter draws our attention to the most serious pollution of all— sin's subtle, hidden contamination in our hearts. While we want pure air and pure water and purity in our foods, I'm afraid purity from sin no longer seems attractive in our society. And even as believers, that may often be our feeling as well. “Holy” is another Biblical word that includes purity— uncontaminated by sin— for sin can be defined as anything that separates us from God. I see the center of gravity for this section we're looking at this morning as vs. 15-16—

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

With "holy" we often have the negative association of a "holier than thou" attitude. But I get a different feel from what Peter is telling us, especially in the way The Message states verse 15—
let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness.

Now that sounds like something I'd like. That is the result of setting our *hope fully on the grace given us* (1 Pet. 1:13). How do we do that?

THEREFORE... "Be Holy"

The word "therefore" keeps this closely connected to what we've studied the past two weeks. It is all rooted in the power of Christ's resurrection from the dead and what His resurrection means as we incorporate its truth into our hearts, as Peter states in the key verses, setting the theme of all that follows in this letter— 1 Peter 1:3-5, the verses we used in our call to worship today.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

*In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

*4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you,
5 who through faith are shielded by God's power*

until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

So the "therefore" flows from this living hope rooted in the Resurrection that guarantees an inheritance in heaven and power now to live as overcomers. Then last week, we looked at those verses following that, reminding us that even suffering is being used to refine us, deepen us, and strengthen our character because God is in control.

Throughout this letter, Peter is telling us what it means to live in the power of the Resurrection that God gives us in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Now this power is applied to enabling us to live lives that are holy, pure, not dragged down by sin. The whole point here is, this is not a self-help reform. It is what God's power is working to accomplish in every believer— holiness and purity.

"Consecrated," "set apart," is the meaning of "holy." Certainly it means being apart from all that is degrading, all that is sin and impure. It is to be like God. And, to be like God is to be like Jesus— the perfect reflection of God for us in our humanity. If we think about holiness as being like Jesus, it gives a whole different perspective on what it means to be holy. The goal of the Christian life is not simply to get us into heaven, but to get heaven into us! As Richard Foster says,

the ultimate goal of the Christian life [is] an ever deeper formation of the inner personality so as to reflect the glory and goodness of God; and ever more radiant conformity to the life and faith and desires and habits of Jesus....

Here, I think The Message captures the energy and excitement of this call:

*...let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life,
a life energetic and blazing with holiness.*

God said, "I am holy, you be holy." (15-16)

I'll have to admit that at first, the way my brother paraphrases this, though nice, and not nearly as bland as "be holy," seemed to be a bit of a stretch for this text. But the more I've mulled this section of Scripture over in my study, the more I like what he does for us by using the word "pulled."...*let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life....* The action starts and continues with God. Remember, the Spirit, the power that raised Jesus from the dead is the **HOLY** Spirit. His work within the believer is to make us holy—transforming us deeply within to be like Jesus. Because, through the Holy Spirit at work within us, God is at work pulling further along into being more like Jesus, there are some things we can do to cooperate. The Biblical word for this process is "sanctification." If you look back at how Peter begins this letter, you'll note vs. 2 refers to *the sanctifying work of the Spirit*. The list of imperatives leading up to our text that calls us to be holy like Jesus is holy are ways we go about cooperating with this process of the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

PREPARE! (vs. 13-16)

First, Peter says, *prepare your minds for action!* I rather like the way the RSV puts it, following the KJV with, *gird up your minds*. This fairly literally follows the Greek. Remember in that day, people wore long robes. When they needed to run, do some strenuous activity, or needed agility, they would hike-up their robes and tie a belt around to leave their lower legs unencumbered by clothing. Here is something we must do. It is word-picture of preparation for action— "Get ready!"

There is a sense of urgency that continues through this letter. Of course, as I've mentioned, these early Christians Peter is writing to are facing suffering in various ways through persecution. Certainly when we run into trouble, it is time to do everything we can to get ready, prepare so we can be strong enough to get through it. It is time to be done with sin and spiritual compromises.

We all know what it is to enter a day unprepared. Maybe we stayed up too late, got up late, rushed around getting ready, skipped breakfast (or just grabbed a few donuts on the way to work) and then you are immediately confronted with a bunch of stuff at work you're not prepared to handle. You feel tired and out-of-sorts. You feel like you're playing catch-up all day long.

Our Christian life can feel like that. When we are lazy, procrastinate, neglect our devotional time with the Lord, and then tough things are thrown at us, we are not ready. It can seem like we're playing catch-up. Someone shares a problem, there is an opportunity to witness, and we pull back because we have not been in touch with the Lord that day.

What a difference it makes to enter into a day well-prepared. In school, you're facing a track event, and you know you've trained well and are at top-form; or you're going into a test, having studied the material well. Spiritually, if we "gird up our minds," we've spent ample time with the Lord in prayer and meditation on His Word. Our hearts are open and yielded to the Lord—tuned into what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and leading us to be and do through the day. We are centered in God, His call, and His purpose in the day— not easily distracted.

This first command, *prepare your minds for action* is a call to be clear-thinking, alert, and not deceived by this world's thinking and rationalizations. This world keeps saying sin is not such a big deal— in fact that's where the fun is. We are being brainwashed by the images and programs we watch on T.V., the movies we see, and much of the reading our popular culture puts out. Rarely do we see the tragic consequences of sin accurately portrayed.

About a month ago, Eli Estrada found \$140,000 in cash on his way to work in Long Beach, CA. It was in a bag in the middle of the road, all \$20 bills bundled into wads of \$20,000, unmarked. The 40-year-old Estrada's first thought was, "I'm rich!" Just six months ago, he'd opened his own landscaping and artificial-grass business. He was in debt. He was having a hard time making his child support payments and he supports his mother who moved in with him last year after she lost her home to a bungled refinancing plan.

Think about the temptation. This is untraceable cash. He could quietly supplement his income, get out of debt, and no one would be the wiser. Besides, the bag of money could be from some drug deal, and Eli would certainly put it to better use. He could even see this as a gift from God— after all, he was sacrificing to help his mother. But in spite of that temptation and those very real needs, his immediate decision was to turn in the money. Since it wasn't his money, he said he knew it wasn't right to keep it if the rightful owner could be found. When he turned it in to the Long Beach police department he said, "It was hard to give up." It turned out to be money lost by a Brinks driver. Brinks later gave Eli \$2,000 for returning the money. Eli said he was content with his decision. That day, Eli's mind was prepared to handle that temptation. His moral values we're solidly in place along with a strong character that would not be swayed or compromised. Now some may argue finer points of the "finders keepers" law— and perhaps this isn't the most major sin he's wrestling with. But it does show strength of character— a mind prepared.

Peter goes on then with three more exhortations, given in the imperative voice, before getting to the command to *be holy* (16). After, *prepare your minds for action*,

- 2nd, *be self-controlled*. This really compliments the first command. Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest says the sense of this is to "be calm and collected in spirit." So, after we prepare our minds for action, we are to get calm and focused.
- 3rd, *...set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed*. The Biblical definition of hope, remember, is not wishful thinking. It is rather an expectancy of what God has promised— undergirded with assurance and anticipation. To "set our hope fully," says we're not looking elsewhere for assurance.
- 4th *do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance*. (14) This refers to our lives before becoming a Christian. It acknowledges there will be a pull to go back to that old way of life. We must resist that pull.

The 5th admonition, *be holy* (16), caps off this paragraph— repeated four times in two verses that we've already highlighted.

LIVE AS STRANGERS (vs. 17-21)

Peter began this letter addressing these Christians as "strangers."

To God's elect, strangers in the world.... (1:1)

Now, here it is again.

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

We are meant to be different, not fit in with the world. Because we belong to God, our values and desires will make us feel like we don't fit in with this world's system. If we feel too comfortable with this world's attitude and its life-style, we are not taking the call to holiness seriously enough in our living. This does not mean we need to be odd or weird or not enjoy anything of this life. But, we will march to a different drum-beat. And, we should not be surprised when that calls us to look different and behave differently. Jesus didn't fit-in. And you should be worried if you fit-in too well.

This is also being aware that this world is not our home. When you know you're living in a place only temporarily, it changes your perspective, doesn't it? When I was in college in Seattle, I enjoyed the city, but my main focus, allegiance, and involvement was with the college community. I didn't pay much attention to the local politics. My life was oriented around a different schedule— mid-terms, finals, papers due and breaks. For the most part, none of this was relevant to the other hundreds of thousands of people living in Seattle. It was a different world within the Seattle world. And I knew, once I graduated, I'd be moving on to a different school in a different part of the country (in this case, seminary in Kentucky). That's how following Jesus should be— living in the kingdom of God. We are more in tune with Jesus and what He desires than what this world is telling us.

And, in my final year, wearied of dorm life, three of us rented an unfurnished apartment across the street from the campus. We knew we'd only be there for 9 mo., so did we go down to a nice furniture store and buy furniture? Not only could we not afford it, we didn't want to be encumbered with moving or selling nice stuff when we left. So, we went to Goodwill and St. Vincent DePaul and for a few bucks had what we needed. (The easy chair I got at St. Vincent DePaul for under \$7 sticks in my memory as one of the most comfortable I've ever known!)

“Temporary” changes the way we look at things, doesn't it? That's what our Scripture is teaching this morning about this world and its affairs. We're part of the kingdom of God. And, our future home is heaven. All this stuff is very temporary.

The *reverent fear* part is a call to live respectful of Christ's call and authority. It means we should be careful in our walk with Christ, because we were bought (“redeemed”) out of the slave market of this world, not for money, but with Jesus' own blood. We belong to Him as Master now. We should then treat that relationship with care and respect.

This leads us on to obeying the truth revealed in the Word of God which is the other crucial element in allowing ourselves to be "pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life." Time will only allow me to touch on this now, but I hope to pick-up this truth again in a later sermon.

THE LIVING WORD (22-2:3)

1 Pet 1:22-23: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have*

sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

The Word of God is "living and enduring." "Living," it contains life from God. It is "God-breathed"— His Spirit goes with it to accomplish what it says. "Enduring" or "abiding" means it is unchanging and forever. In fact our being "born again" is a product of God's Word accomplishing what it says in our lives. Now Peter says, we need to carefully maintain an ongoing relationship with that Word— taking us ever deeper into the life God has planned for us to live. Jesus' prayer in John 17:17 for us to His heavenly Father is: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." The Word of God is ever our standard. Regular prayer/ meditation on it will bring sanctifying grace into our lives, changing us to be like Christ.

CONCLUSION

We are terribly prone to settle for far less than God desires for us. We are glad enough for God to remove an irritating behavior from our personality, or destructive addiction. But, it's a different thing for him to begin restructuring our inner affections. God is not seeking to improve us, but to transform us. And to that end, every event in your life is directed. God wants to use the bad times, the good times, and the in between times to transform the inner person. Our marriages, friendships, relationships, absolutely everything are all tools in His hand to bring forth the image of Christ.

C.S. Lewis writes that God is intent upon making us into,

a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright, stainless mirror that reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness.