

Here/There—Holiness

1 Peter 1:16 says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” If you are really connected to Jesus, then your life should display the holiness of Jesus. Two weeks ago I gave you a sneak peek of this sermon. Does anyone remember what holy means? It’s the idea of separation. It comes from the word *hágios*—“set apart, different, unlike the rest.” A holy thing is something devoted to a special purpose. It is not to be used for common things, not for ordinary purposes. It’s sacred.

Holy is the fine china you only use when mom comes for the holidays. Holy is the pretty candles that you dust, but never burn. Holy is the gift set of golf balls you got that are just too nice to ever swing a club at. You get the idea. Holy is to be set apart. You don’t break out the good plates for pizza night, right?

God calls you to be holy. He has set you apart for a special purpose.

This is important to understand while we are trying to live both HERE and THERE. We’re in a series from 1 Peter called Here / There, because as Christians we live lives that are part of two different worlds. We are a part of this world of flesh and blood and space and time, and we are a part of a spiritual reality that is much greater than we can even understand. We are a part of here and now. We live in this moment, but we also live for eternity. We are destined for a heavenly home. This isn’t our true home, we’re just passing through. So what does it mean to be holy while we’re here?

It can be easy to lose that balance. We can get so enamored with life HERE that we forget that our true home is THERE. Other times it seems like the best way to be holy is to withdraw as far as possible from this world. Couldn’t we be really holy then? If we just lived in a Christian bubble, a bio-dome for believers only.

A great example of this is Symeon Stylites. Stylites wasn’t his last name. It comes from the Greek word for pillar, but we’ll get to that in a bit.

Symeon was a shepherd boy in the 5th century from the very part of the Roman Empire that Peter is writing to in 1 Peter. Symeon really wanted to take seriously this call to be holy, so when he was 16 years old, he entered a monastic order. He gave himself up to a lifestyle of extreme self-denial and poverty called asceticism.

The goal of asceticism was to separate you from the temptations and desires of this world. If you can separate yourself from HERE enough, you’ll be better prepared for THERE. You get the picture? Symeon once went 40 days without food or water and was found unconscious. It was considered a miracle. He would stay standing until his legs would literally collapse beneath him. As a form of penance, he would bind himself until the ropes cut into his flesh and his wounds

would fester and maggots fell from his body. He was seen to pick the maggots up and return them to the wound saying, "Please, eat what the Lord has given you."

Believe it or not asceticism was a fairly popular thing to do at the time. People would get rid of all their worldly belongings, move to the desert, and live a life of self-denial. Those who were best at it became like pop stars and throngs of pilgrims would go to the desert to pick up any crumb of wisdom from these saints that they could.

However, Symeon's self-deprivation was so extreme that the monks asked him to leave the monastery. They suggested he'd be much happier if he could starve himself and suffer out in the desert. So, Symeon shut himself up in a hut for one and a half years. The problem is that huts in the desert are pretty easy to find, and the pilgrims kept interrupting his prayers. Next he moved to a small rocky outcropping in the mountains, but crowds of people still swarmed his hideaway.

Finally, he made his home in the ruins of an ancient city. He took up residence on top of a pillar that was 9 feet high figuring that he could get away from the world up here, but the pillar proved too easy to climb. Eventually, he ended up on a pillar that was 50 feet high. He had a small platform that was only about 1 meter square.

Boys from a nearby village would climb the pillar and give him beans and water. The more he tried to get away from the world, the more his fame spread and people came from all over. It was said that maggots that fell from his body would turn to pearls. Sometimes he would tie himself to the pillar. Other times he would pray for hours with his arms outstretched like a cross. But his most common practice was to pray while repeatedly bending the forehead of his skeletal frame to his feet. One pilgrim counted 1,244 bends before giving up count. In all, Symeon Stylites spent 39 years atop his pillar where he died.

Is this what God had in mind when he called us to be holy? Sure Symeon was set apart. He was completely focused on life THERE. But what good did he do HERE? If every believer ran off into the desert to live the solitary life, how would we be salt and light?

We are called to be holy. We are to be set apart. We are to be different. We are to be other. But we are here and there. We can't live on a 50 ft pole. We must live here and there. But how?

Let's read 1 Peter 1:13-25 and we'll find out.

13 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. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 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, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile

*ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,
19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.
20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the
last times for the sake of you 21 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.*

*22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly
love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again,
not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;
24 for
“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.”
And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

So, according to this passage holiness happens with...

I. A Properly Prepared Mind.

Peter writes, *“Therefore, preparing your minds for action...”* Although holiness is seen in our action, it begins with our thinking. Right thinking leads to right doing.

The Greek word for prepare is such an interesting word. The text literally reads “gird up the loins of your mind.” This refers to the clothing they wore back in New Testament times. They wore long robes, wraps and tunics that made it difficult to do things like heavy labor or go into battle. So, if you wanted to build a stone wall or run into combat you had to “gird up” your robe so you could run.

If you didn’t gird up, your tunic could trip you up or get in the way. What Peter is telling us here is that there are things in our thinking that trip us up and getting in the way. This stinking thinking is causing us to fall into sin.

Preparing our minds for action requires changing our thinking on some things. We need to read more. Think more. Don’t feed our minds so much junk.

Paul talks about the importance of our thinking in Philippians 4:8,

whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Paul then goes on to say in verse 9, *“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me— put it into practice.”* He begins with thinking and ends with practice. Same thing Peter says— right thinking leads to right doing.

All right, back to 1 Peter. Peter then says we need to be sober-minded. It literally means “not drunk.” It was a figure of speech meaning that we can “see things as they really are.” Today, we have the term “beer goggles” to describe how alcohol can make you see things not as they really are.

Peter says we have a problem with “sin goggles.” Sin and unholy stuff clouds our thinking. It makes us delusional and keeps us from seeing things as they really are. We lie to ourselves, and we believe those lies. “I don’t really have an anger problem. It’s everyone else.” “I can stop whenever I want.” “It’s just harmless fun.” “We’re only texting. It’s just Facebook. It’s not serious.” “If I had a husband like him, then I’d be happy.”

Any lie becomes believable through the lens of sin. Do you know what clears our vision and helps us see things as they really are? Three things and you probably already know the answer—God’s word, God’s people, and God’s Spirit.

If you aren’t reading God’s Word, spending time with God, learning from his word; if you aren’t in fellowship with a local church, if you aren’t listening to the wisdom of the people of God, if you aren’t accountable to brothers or sisters in Christ; if you aren’t following the leading of the Holy Spirit, then you’re not thinking straight. It’s time to gird up your mind.

II. A Properly Placed Hope

Secondly, we need a properly placed hope. Peter goes on to say, “*Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

What he’s talking about here is when Jesus returns and we begin our eternity with him. He’s talking about THERE. Our hope needs to be set THERE. Our hope needs must be placed in Jesus’ return.

Hope that is set anywhere else will disappoint. Living HERE our earthly desires will constantly try to get us to set our hope on something HERE rather than THERE. If I can just make this GPA. If I can just get this score on my ACT. If I can just get into that school. If I can just get that degree. If I can just get that job. If I can just get that position. If I can just find the right boyfriend. If I can just find the right girlfriend. If I could just get that car. If I could just get that house... If...If...If.

No hope set HERE will ever get you THERE. It will always leave you disappointed. There is no perfect job. There is no such thing as “The One.” There is no human being on this planet who is capable of fulfilling your every dream and satisfying every need of your heart. What kind of pressure is that to put on another human being? It is your job to make me happy. That’s not your wife’s job, your husband’s job, your boyfriend’s job, your girlfriend’s job, or your child’s job, or your parent’s job. If your happiness and your hope is dependent on another person, you will be disappointed. You know how I know that, because they’re a person. That’s why.

Dream homes have a way of becoming run down. Basements leak. Shingles get blown off. Windows become drafty. Appliances quit working. Styles and fashions change. Your needs and desires change. Today's dream home becomes someone else's fixer upper tomorrow.

That's how it is with all stuff that teases, tempts and titillates and causes us to put our hope HERE. Today's treasure becomes tomorrow's trash. Just go to the dump and watch what people bring in. Go to the junk yard and look at the rows of cars. Do you know what you see? It's what used to be someone's hopes and dreams.

Make sure your hope is properly placed THERE or you won't make it HERE.

III. A Passion for Obedient Action.

Next, Peter says we need a passion for obedient action. Look at verses 14-16:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

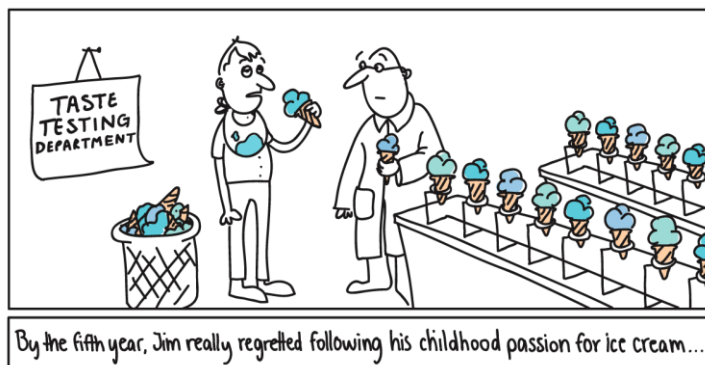
Some of you, when you read "obedient children," have no idea what he's talking about. :)

You weren't an obedient child and your children are on your very last nerve.

But think about it. Why do we want our kids to obey?

Ultimately, we want them to live! When the kid is chasing an errant ball into the street and his mom yells, "Stop!" If he ignores her, if he waits until she yells two or three more times, he could die.

Sometimes we tolerate rebelliousness when the kids are little because it looks kinda cute. But what looks cute when she's 4 isn't cute anymore when she's 14. Disobedience is not cute; it's deadly. Obedience isn't just life and death. It's eternal. It's true for our kids and it's true in our relationship with God.



Peter says one of the keys to obedience is not listening to our worldly passions. Just because you want it doesn't mean you have to do it. Last week we honored our graduates. One of the most oft-quoted pieces of advice given to graduates is follow your passion. What a lot of people mean by this is do something you love.

But there is a deep spiritual problem we have with our passions. There are a lot of good passions, and a lot of things we should be passionate about, but we can be passionate about a

lot of bad things. Sin causes our hearts to want things that are unholy, things that are deadly and destructive. Peter is saying we cannot be defined by these passions. Instead of being defined by sinful passions, we should be passionate about obedience. We should be defined by his holiness.

IV. A Healthy Fear

The next thing that steers our lives toward holiness is a healthy fear. Listen to verse 17:

17 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,

Did you notice what he called them? It's that word we saw a couple of weeks ago— exiles? HERE is not their true home. We don't belong HERE. We belong THERE. One of the things that helps us keep a holy balance between HERE and THERE is a healthy fear. "Conduct yourselves with fear while you're HERE," Peter says.

Scripture has a lot to say about fear. In the Bible, there are basically two kinds of fear. First is the fear of God. Second is the fear of everything else. This second kind of fear is the fear of losing what's important to us— our job, our family, our reputation, or money, our health.

When it comes to this kind of fear, the Bible says, "Do not fear. Do not be afraid."

When Peter says, "*conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.*" He's not talking about this second kind of fear.

He's talking about the 1st kind of fear— a fear of God. This is about having respect and reverence for God and his holiness. This isn't cowering in a corner because we're afraid of him. It is having a proper recognition, understanding and awe of who he is. And, that kind of fear is a good thing.

Today is Mother's Day, so I'll use her as an example. Growing up, I loved my mom, but I also had a healthy, biblical fear of her. I loved her. I knew that she loved me. I enjoyed her and the things that we did together. I had an awesome mom. But there was also a healthy fear of her.

A fear of God puts all of our other fears into proper perspective. For example, if the dominating fear of my life is what other people think about me, then I'm going to allow that fear to drive me to do some really stupid things, even some really unholy things.

But if I have a proper, healthy respect and fear of God, then what God thinks is most important. What He says about me is what matters most, and my life will no longer be driven by my fear of what others think. And that helps me be the holy person he's called me to be.

V. A Proper View of Jesus.

In the last few verses we see that we find holiness when we have a proper view of Jesus.

18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 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.

Peter is saying that Jesus is the standard for holiness. If you want to know what holiness looks like, look at Jesus. This is what it means when it says he was *“a lamb without blemish or spot.”* He is holy. He lived a perfectly holy life.

It is His holiness that empowered him to die in our place. He couldn't pay the penalty of my sin, unless he was without sin. It is his holiness transferred to us that enables us to live holy lives now.

Let me put these verses in terms of HERE and THERE. Jesus came from THERE to HERE to live HERE like someone from THERE so that those of us HERE could go THERE. Jesus went from HERE to THERE to prepare a place THERE for those of us who still live HERE. One day he will return from THERE to HERE to take us to be with him THERE.

That's what holiness is all about— living lives HERE that have been transformed by THERE. Have you ever been someplace that changed your life? An active volcano. Maybe you drove through Joplin after the tornado. That can reshape your view of the world. Maybe you went on a mission trip and you saw poverty worse than you ever imagined. That can change your life. For me, it was going to New York City after 9-11 terrorist attack. Going THERE changed me. Wherever HERE is for me for the rest of my life, it will be different because of THERE.

That's Peter's idea in our Scripture this morning, but ultimately the THERE that changes us, isn't about a place. It isn't a point on a map. Your GPS can't take you THERE. THERE is about a WHO. THERE is important because of WHO is THERE. We want to go THERE because of WHO we will be with, And that WHO has completely redefined life HERE.