

1 Peter 1:13-19
(Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 11:9-13)
“A Holy Life”

Introduction

Peter opens this letter with a compelling summary of the gospel of grace and a description of the marks of a faith that proves genuine. Now, in the verses before us, he calls us to live this new life won for us in Christ’s life, death and resurrection victory. A.W. Tozer has wonderfully captured this call to holy living in his classic work entitled *The Pursuit of God*:

The pursuit of God will embrace the labor of bringing our total personality into conformity to his. And this not judicially, but actually. I do not here refer to the act of justification by faith in Christ. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to his proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission which the Creator-creature circumstance makes proper. The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all, we step out of the world’s parade.

I invite you this first Sunday in Advent to “step out of the world’s parade.” In the opening words of our text, “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” (1:13). This little verb “preparing” is made to do the work of translating an expression that Peter used, “girding up your loins.” The expression has to do with stripping off anything loose and baggy that would encumber you and tightening up your belt as you prepare for action. It involves a serious work of preparation before a battle or an athletic contest. How are we to understand this as we prepare for the great contest of life?

Body

1. First, face the future with confidence (1:13).

There is a wonderful logic to Peter’s words: Note that he does not begin by looking back, but by looking ahead. If we begin by looking back, we will tend to be paralyzed by our own sense of unworthiness, by the failures and compromises of the past. Our past brokenness will tend to define our present and set the trajectory of our future. Too many people today are tragically bound by their past because they see it as the inevitable foundation of everything that follows.

But Peter tells us to start with the future, with the promise of God to make all things new in Christ, to wipe away our tears, to banish everything that would separate us from his love. He invites us to begin with the end in sight, to move forward drawn on by the vision of God's glorious kingdom: "set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13).

When you think about the future, what is the substance of your hope? Do you stop with a vision of a successful career or a happy marriage or a prosperous retirement? Or do you take the longer look: Do you "prepare for action" by sober-mindedly setting "your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"?

2. Second, face the present with obedience (1:14-17).

When we keep the end clearly in view, when we begin to catch a vision of the One who is holy and realize that his aim in both creation and redemption is to make us like him, then we begin to understand the reason for casting aside everything that encumbers us and keeps us from pursuing the life to which we are called. Then we realize increasingly that everything else – all that this world pretends is of ultimate importance – is only holding us back from our destiny in Christ Jesus: to be holy, for he is holy.

But there are at least two problems in understanding these words: First, God's holiness is the essence of his difference from us. His holiness is the perfection of all his other attributes: his love is holy, his mercy is holy, his goodness is holy. In this way we see the perfection of his love and mercy and goodness, in contrast to our somewhat defective love, mercy and goodness. So how can we be holy? Here, we must remember that we were originally created in God's image and likeness in order to be like him, and that in redeeming us, God has given us his own nature, his Holy Spirit, to plant within us the seed of new and holy life.

But that raises a second problem: Many of us think of the word "holy" in a legalistic, religious sort of way that makes it seem unreal and unattractive. When someone says, "She's so holy," they don't usually mean it as a compliment. But this is not the Bible's idea of holiness. Holiness is, rather, the life of Christ within us, a life that is to be nurtured, tended and strengthened as we turn away from the broken patterns of the past and begin to follow Christ in a life of self-sacrificial love. Simple obedience to the pattern of Jesus' own life, trusting and gladly obeying God's commands, is the path to holiness of conduct. This life is best depicted in such places as Jesus washing his disciples' feet and telling them that the one great mark of their discipleship will be the love they have for one another (John 13); it is Paul telling the Corinthian Christians that no matter how spiritually gifted they are, if they do

not love one another, all their religious activity is no more than meaningless noise (1Corinthians 13).

Why do we mess with things that can only prevent us from having what we most desire? People jeopardize all their hopes and dreams for a moment's pleasure, for the indulgence of an addiction, or for the fleeting praise of people rather than seeking God's, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Peter warns us, "Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1:15). The heart of holiness is the great commandment: loving God and loving one another.

3. Finally, face the past with gratitude (1:18-19).

In the light of the consummation of grace that awaits us when Jesus Christ comes in glory and in the light of our present experience of that new life as we grow in our likeness to Christ, we can come to terms with our past, even with its most painful moments and most crushing failures. "Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1:18,19).

Is your past still a sort of black hole that sucks all your energy as you relive painful events and try to understand them, or as you try desperately to conceal a painful past out of fear that you will be rejected if your past is discovered? God's love for you is so great that he ransomed you "with the precious blood of Christ." When you finally begin to grasp that, and when you understand that God has broken the evil power of the memories of those past events, has removed your guilt and shame promising to remember those things no more, then you can begin to embrace the story of your life as something that God will take and fashion to make you something beautiful for him. Are you willing to have him do that?

Conclusion

Salvation is not merely an event in the past but is something being worked out by God's grace in the present. It is a new life for those of us who are in Christ Jesus and in whom his Spirit dwells, and it is lived in a new context, one that faces the future, the present and the past in the light of the victory won for us so that we might no longer live out of our brokenness, but out of his wholeness and holiness. As we enter another Advent season, heed Tozer's call to "step out of the worlds parade" and into the path that leads to life and joy and peace.