

Being Holy

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Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] As we stand, let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word that gives us life. And we pray that as we listen to it, that you would give us eternal life.

And we ask, Father, that you would help us to know Jesus and his grace, that we might respond faithfully to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Please be seated. Amen. We're continuing our sermon series on 1 Peter chapter 1.

We're actually doing the whole book, but we're on chapter 1, verse 13 through 2, 3. And one of the things that you missed, by the way, as we're looking at this in the 9 a.m. service, David Short did the children's focus.

And he did an excellent, he prepared an excellent Mother's Day children's focus. And then found out just before the service that it's not Mother's Day today. It is in Australia, he said.

[1 : 07] But that's always the excuse. But I noticed that Bron Short at the service was there and wisely did not tell him the truth.

So, she gets two breakfasts, one this week and one next week. But it was a great children's focus because it talked about children and the way that they respond to their parents, the love that they have for their parents.

And he called them to action, to love them and to actually speak of their love. This passage today is a call to action for children of a Heavenly Father.

A very strong call to action, to be holy, to be obedient to God and to be extravagantly loving. But it is a biblical and a Christian call to action.

And so, therefore, it is surrounded by grace. And that's what's wonderful about this passage. You see it right at the beginning in verse 12. The good news has been preached to you, it says in verse 12.

[2 : 09] And then in the middle, in verse 18, it says that you were ransomed from futile ways by the precious blood of Jesus. There's the grace of God.

In verse 23, you have been born anew, it says. And then finally, at the end, it says that you have tasted the goodness of the Lord.

And this is the pattern of the New Testament writers and shows the uniqueness of Christianity. Any call to action, anything that we are called to do, happens because God has given us His grace first. And that we are surrounded by that grace. And the grace of God runs through everything that we do and are called to do. The Bible in the New Testament, we see the writers talking about God's grace. And then showing us how to receive that grace into our lives. I was helped by what a preacher said recently about the difference between Christianity and other religions.

[3 : 15] He said that all religions are basically instructions with stories sprinkled through to illustrate the instruction. But the Bible is different.

It is a true story that is sprinkled with instruction. And I think this is very helpful because it shows that Christianity is not really a religion.

It is the true story of God rescuing the broken world in Jesus Christ. And mingled in that story is instruction about how to receive that incredible gift of rescue.

Now, unfortunately, one can read the Bible without realizing it. You can read it for its instruction and ignore the big story. We can actually do that with this passage.

The experts in the law did it. Jesus said to them in John 5, 39, You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me.

[4 : 16] Yet you refuse to come to me to have life, to have rescue. That's a shocking statement for Jesus to make because these men knew the Bible extremely well.

They memorized it. It was their vocation. And yet they did not see that the Old Testament fully, completely all through it, testifies about Jesus. They only sought for its instruction.

And so even though they knew God's word, they did not come to Jesus to have life. Now, the wonderful thing about this passage is that it gives us clear and strong instruction as how to live. And that instruction is overshadowed by the grace of God. And that's why right in the middle, in verse 18, we hear about Jesus ransoming us. It talks about the core of the good news by his precious blood.

And that perfectly illustrates Christianity. Jesus gives us new life. That is the point. And then we are called to actively receive that life. I want you to look down at verse 23.

[5 : 20] Because I think this is a very good way for us to see this grace in our life. It describes the new life by saying, You have been born anew.

And I must say this can be an uncomfortable phrase for us. It means born again. And in popular culture around us, to be born again means to be sort of an extreme brand of Christianity. You know, something that's out on the fringe. But the Bible doesn't see it that way at all. Every writer in the New Testament tells us that we must be born again. It runs throughout the good news of Jesus.

We must be born again. Jesus himself says, No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. And all the Christian instruction, all calls to action are meaningless unless the, in fact, it's an oppressive weight that is on our shoulders, unless you are born again.

It is the crucial fact in the Christian life that this happens to us. But the question is, how are we born again?

[6 : 30] How does it happen? Well, verse 23 gives the very straightforward answer. If you look at it, We are born again, it says, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

And then it quotes the Old Testament, Isaiah 46 through 8. All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of God abides forever. What's happening here? It is through hearing the word of God that you are born again, that you receive spiritual birth. And the illustration that's used of the word of God is that of a seed.

It's a very helpful illustration. It's the word of God being planted in you. And this is a good time of year to talk about it, isn't it? It's a time of planting. Probably many of you are planting things in your gardens, or you're waiting until actually some warm weather comes to plant them.

But it's a time of year of putting seeds in the ground, putting plants in the ground. My four-year-old son Alexander and I were talking about this and watching all of the different seeds and so forth that he has, thinking of putting them in the ground.

[7 : 46] And we were joking about putting money in the ground. You know, what if we put money in? What would happen? Maybe a money tree would come. And of course, Alexander thought of the great possibilities. You just go out, pick some money, and go out and buy a toy.

Let's plant lots of money. Or he could plant a stone, and out would come a tree full of gravel, and he could make things for his big, mighty trucks that he plays with.

But he and I knew, he knew, we were joking, because of the fact that the seeds we were talking about planting had no life in them. We know that for any life to grow, there has to be life in the seed. And that's true for humans. It's true for plants as well. And Peter says that the Word of God is not only a living seed, it is an eternal seed.

It's living and abides forever, Isaiah says. And so as you hear the Word, eternal life is being planted within you. There's many things we can read.

[8 : 50] Many great things, articles, literature, books that we can read, investment advice, instructions on how to live, inspiring novels.

But none of these have life in themselves. Reading them is like planting money or planting stones. Life will not come out of them. Peter tells us the only way that we are born again is by hearing the living Word of God, the eternal Word.

I think many of you were here three weeks ago when Jennifer was baptized here at the service. And it was great to hear her testimony. And what was remarkable is to hear that it was through picking up a Bible and reading it every day for 18 months that she experienced God and came to believe and have trust in Jesus Christ.

and then come to church and then be baptized. It's often the backwards way of the way we do it. But this is what the Word of God does for us. It brings spiritual life to us.

It's a powerful gift that God has given. And this happens in a variety of ways for many different people. Some know the precise moment when they are born again. They can tell you the day and the time of when it happened, the place and everything.

[10:09] But I think more often people do not know exactly when it happens, even though it is the crucial event of the Christian life. They come to the realization, having heard God's Word over a period of time, that they are alive to God because of Jesus Christ.

And that makes sense because that's the way it works with physical birth. When a woman becomes pregnant, she is not aware right away of when she conceives, when new life has begun in her.

She may feel signs of life. She may suspect for various reasons that she's pregnant. And then finally it is confirmed. But she didn't know the exact moment that life was conceived.

Even as real life was growing in her, she wasn't aware of it until later. And this is often a subtle way that God brings about spiritual birth through His Word.

As you read His Word, God forms His eternal life in you. And even if you do not realize it at the time, it soon becomes unmistakable because of being able to confess Jesus as Lord, of having faith in Him.

[11:21] It is revealed that there is life. Just like a test reveals one is having new life within them physically. And this brings us to the fact that lots of people have read the Bible, they've gone to chapters or wherever, picked up a Bible and read it and got to know it quite well and would not say that they are born again.

They read it out of interest, but there is no spiritual birth. In fact, that's what the experts in the law were doing. They really were searching diligently in it, but refused to come to Jesus to have life. And what this shows is that it's not the amount of knowledge we have of the Bible, how spiritual we are, how intelligent we are. It's not that that brings life or even how good you are at keeping the instruction.

It's actually knowing who the Bible points to, what the big story is in the Bible, the point of all of it, which is the true story of Jesus. The end of verse 25 tells us this, doesn't it?

It says, That word is the good news which was preached to you, the good news about Jesus Christ. And so all the Bible, including the Old Testament, is actually the good news about Jesus.

[12:35] And if you miss this, you miss the big story of the Bible. Well, that's why it's so helpful that in the center of our passage, Peter makes the big story of the Bible clear.

Look at verse 18. That's a great summary of the Gospel. It says, You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your father, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He, Jesus, was destined before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest at the end of times for your sake. Through him, Jesus, you have confidence in God, who raised him, Jesus, from the dead, and gave Jesus glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

You see how Jesus is mentioned over and over again. He is the good news. We were released from the slavery of meaningless life by his precious blood.

And this is not an accident. This was God's plan, it says here, from before the creation of the world. Even as sin and the futile life came into the world through Adam's sin, God's plan was to rescue us by his sacrificial death.

[13:57] We are freed from the futile life through the forgiveness of sins and Jesus' death and resurrection. And that is why our faith and our hope is in God, says there at the end of that section.

Well, that's what it means to be born again. It means to have faith and hope in God. And there are profound practical changes that take place as we are born again.

And I want to look at them briefly. There's four things I want to point to. Look at verse 13. It says, first of all, that our minds are different. Our relationship with ourselves are different.

And it says there that we are called to get our minds ready for action. That we are going to focus our minds on something new. On the revelation of Jesus Christ. The grace of his revelation.

I like the way that the prayer from the prayer book called it. He said, It prays that we would surely be fixed in the place where true joys are to be found through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[14:58] That's what this is a call to. To have our minds fixed on us seeing Jesus in the future. And it's very important because we are easily distracted by the hope that the world offers.

But all of the hopes, all of the things that we hope will give us fulfillment and happiness are things that are transient. They will betray us in the end. Prepare your minds to look at the right thing. The thing that is a true hope. And then second profound change is that our relationship with outsiders is different. You know, it says there in verse 14, As obedient children, don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who has called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.

So it says live life in reference to the fact that Jesus has set us apart for him. He has released us and freed us for life with him.

And let that fact shape the decisions of what you do and what you say. Thirdly, the relationship not only with ourselves and outsiders is different, but the relationship with God is different.

[16:14] You call him father now. And that's evident throughout this passage. He says, Because you invoke the name of father, if you invoke as father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

You know, it is because we are born again, because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, that we are able to call God Abba Father. Therefore, it says, conduct yourselves with fear, meaning a reverential awe, a deep love and respect for God as a child would have for his or her parent. And so like a loving child, live to hear his praise. Have pride in him. The way the prayer in the prayer book said is, Love the thing which God commands. Desire that which God promises. Isn't that a marvelous expression of what it means to be a loving child of God? Our relationship with God is different. Live out of a desire to please him.

And then finally, in verse 22, the relationships we have with our church is different. So in verse 22, and this strikes home for us, Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brothers and sisters in Christ, love one another earnestly from the heart.

[17:37] Earnestly, with everything you have, extravagantly, love one another. And that's not easy to do because of chapter 2, verse 1.

That's a list of the things that actually get in the way of the activity of love. Put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander.

Well, that verse pretty much cuts out 95% of the conversations in church parking lots. It's a very devastating verse in that way. What are we going to talk about?

These are things that we are, we actually tend towards in our human nature. Malice is of the desire to harm people. And often it's hidden behind good actions.

But you see, love seeks what is best in people, not to harm them. It sees them as precious people bought by the precious blood of Christ. Guile is trying to mislead people.

[18:35] But love doesn't mislead or pretend. It completely is honest and open-handed. Love by its nature can't be hidden. It flows out of a sincere heart.

And so insincerity is pushed out by love as well. And then envy, longing for what other people have. This is obviously something that comes from our own sinful nature.

Because love doesn't long for what others have. Instead, it longs to give. It longs to see people succeed and grow in God. To love for the sake of the one that you are loving.

And finally, slander literally means talking down people. You know, pressing them down with your speech. But of course, love doesn't do that. It constantly tries to build people up.

It looks for ways to praise other people. I think it's a great exercise for us to do in the church. Behind people's backs, praise them. Praise them to people behind their backs.

[19:39] It's a great exercise. And you can do it in their face as well, but what a wonderful activity for the church to do. It changes things. Now, when we think of those in our church who are difficult to love, often for personal reasons, this is not easy to do.

It's not easy to put away the sins that Peter says. And it's harder to replace that with an earnest love from your heart. That's why that expression of grace is so important.

We can only do it because God gives new life through his word. Now, as I was thinking of this, actually, as I was writing it, I was experiencing the change that takes place when your roof has to be replaced.

This is happening at our house. We have three layers of shingles. Over decades, they've been put on there and the roof leaks. So this week, we've had people ripping off these layers of shingles.

And what's been amazing about this process is there's two guys working very, very hard at this job. And I was amazed at how quickly they got rid of the shingles on our roof.

[20 : 50] And the reason for that was because they had gravity on their side. All they had to do was get underneath them with a shovel and start prying and pushing them.

And it would all just peel off and fall away. Now, what was difficult was those same two guys had to cart all those shingles away by hand.

in big, huge tarps, putting them in there and pulling them down to the dumpster at the street. And as I was writing the sermon, I could hear them groaning loudly and using all kinds of speech that you usually don't hear when you're writing sermons.

It was extraordinary. And, you know, it sounds like they were dying, actually. They were good sort of sound effects for what you go through when you're writing a sermon, when you're in a difficult stage. So, they very loudly blessed me with this kind of noise.

And I think that without God's grace, we would also groan under the weight of putting off malice and guilt and insincerity and envy and slander.

[21 : 57] You know, over years, these things build up. They become part of who we are, habits. But, you know, God's grace works like the gravity that works on our roof. We are called to put off sin like scraping off shingles and letting them fall away.

And in His grace, God has done the hard work of carting our sin away through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus has taken away the sins we put off. The burden is lifted.

Our work is to put them off. And our change of life and obedience, that call of God to get rid of those things, always takes place under the weight, under the good weight of His grace, which peels that, which takes away that sin.

And that's why I want to close by saying our new spiritual life, the fact that we are born again, is nourished by God's words for this very reason, that we will be transformed, that we will be able to put off sin and put on those things which belong to people who have been freed by Jesus Christ. And that's why the passage ends by saying, verse 2, like newborn babes long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

[23 : 19] In other words, it's saying here, have a deep desire, have an appetite for the spiritual nourishment that is found in God's word, knowing that that is how you were born again.

that is how your new life is nourished as well. My youngest son, Nicholas, is a little over 18 months old, and it doesn't seem like that long ago that he was drinking a bottle.

And I've got to say, this bottle was a big moment in the day. And every four hours, he knew the bottle was coming, and as soon as he saw it, he would give sounds and sort of squeals of delight and anticipation of what he was going to get.

And he'd be all worked up, and you'd come down, you'd give him the bottle, and he wouldn't just take it gently, he would lunge at it, grab it with both hands, and force it into his mouth as quick as he could.

And he'd start eating it with gusto, and it would be gone in seconds. And I think that this is a picture this verse is giving. It is about a love, a deep appetite for the nourishment that comes from God's word.

[24 : 30] It anticipates, wants to receive the goodness of God, knowing that God speaks to you through his word, that he loves you through it, that he leads you through it as well, and that you receive his very life in it.

And I think that's why it's good for us to close with the angels in verse 12, because the angels are a picture of that appetite for the gospel, for God's word.

It says up there in verse 12 that the good news that was given to you through Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, are things into which angels long to look.

And that word for look is the same word of John looking into the empty tomb, stooping down and looking at it, and considering what has happened, wondering at what God has done in this powerful resurrection from the dead.

That's what the angels are doing. They are taking it in. They are wondering at it. They are rejoicing. They have an appetite to see more and more of it. They can't get enough of looking at the gospel and the salvation that God has accomplished for us.

[25 : 39] And our call today is that we also have that appetite for God's word. A look into the gospel over and over again. It changes you. It nourishes the new life you have in Jesus.

Grace has been revealed to us in Jesus. And therefore, may we live for the praise of his glory. Amen.