

Sermon – 1 PETER 1:13 - 2:3, Leroy Coote 7 February 2021

Many around the world would know that tomorrow morning Australian Time, the Gridiron Superbowl will be on between the two best teams in American Football. Synonymous with this event is a man named Tom Brady. Tom Brady is one of the most decorated players in American Football History. He has a long history of making American Football grand finals and is on top of many statistic lists. Apart from that, what sets him apart from the rest? What gives him his longevity in the game given he has played for over 20 years? In some of the articles I read, what set him apart was his ability to find a player with his throws as well as his ability to stay focussed on what he is in the team for. This leads me to wonder, what sets us apart as Christians?

Last week, we touched on the foundation of being a Christian where God has been working in our lives to point us to him. This week, we look at the outworking of last week's foundation – holiness. By definition, holiness means that we are set apart to live our lives as God's people based on what God has done for us. Therefore, living holy lives is what sets us apart as Christians in the world.

1. What we are chosen for?

This is found in verses 13-17 so let me encourage you to have that passage open in your Bibles. This section of our second reading does not start with *what* we are called to, but with the *attitude* with which we are to follow God's call. Listen to what verse 13 says, *"Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober."* We are to be alert and ready in our minds. The reason for this is that the people he is writing to are in a context where God is not known as part of the culture. In light of this, what the original recipients of 1 Peter (Gentile Christians) are to be alert to, are practices that are not consistent with God's practices.

On the other hand, this is also an opportunity to live out the fact that they have been reborn into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But not only are the original readers of this letter called to be alert but they are called to be fully sober. This does not mean free from drunkenness which is what we normally equate the word "sober" to mean. But in this context, the word sober means that they are to be in control of themselves and not influenced by anything else other than God. Therefore, with alert minds and a clear realistic approach, why are they to have this approach?

Verse 13 tells us that their alert and fully sober minds are to set their hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed. This hope is what we were introduced to in the first part of the letter last week. Let me provide a brief reminder of this from 1 Peter 1:3-5, *"³ 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. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.*

This hope comes from God. A God who is merciful to his people. So merciful, in fact, that he gives his people new birth to the point that we are born into a living hope because of what he did. What did he do? He raised his Son Jesus from the dead. He did this so that those who have been chosen by him through the sanctifying work of the Spirit will receive an inheritance that that will never perish, spoil or fade - and is kept in heaven for you. Isn't this a wonderful thing that we can set our hope on and be alert and sober for? Jesus Christ was revealed to the believers through

the sanctifying work of the Spirit but also he will be revealed to the believer in Christ when he returns.

What I have just said implies that the phrase *Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming* applies to when Christ comes into our lives **and** when Jesus eventually comes back to take those to be his; which the Christians, to whom this was written, believed would be soon. How then are they to show their alertness and soberness?

Through holiness.

Look at verses 14-16, "¹⁴As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." These verses effectively define what holiness is. Let us see what this looks like.

Holiness involves being obedient children to God. What does that look like in practice? The rest of verse 14 tells us that obedient children *do not conform to the evil desires*. Often when we think of evil, we think of atrocious things done by one human to another such as someone killing another or a military taking over the running of the country – such as in Burma. Therefore, we don't think that we partake in evil acts. However, evil desires are anything that is in opposition to what God desires, and as believers in Christ, anything that is opposed to God should be considered atrocious. Why is that?

It is because we now know better than to conform to evil desires because we no longer live in ignorance but live in knowledge through the Spirit and God's word. Therefore, if we are genuine believers in Christ, we no longer live in *ignorance* to God, but in the *knowledge* of what God *desires*. Is there a word to describe that? There is and it is the word "holy". It involves being holy and doing holy because God is holy, as spelt out in verses 15 and 16. God is holy because he has set himself apart to rule the world by the perfect standard he sets for his people which he helps them to follow.

Not only that, the practice of holiness in being and doing is what God judges us by as mentioned in verse 17. This means that we are judged by God based on how we live for him in heart, in word and in action and how we are in awe of God which is what reverent fear means. However, there is a very interesting phrase here and that is *live out your time as foreigners here*. This means that wherever God places us, we are to live holy lives in word, in heart and in action as God's people.

Given that this is written to exiles who are foreign to their land, it is also written to us in the world today, as Christians are considered foreigners to the land they are in – especially here in Victoria. How do we change that? We all have a part in changing that because God calls each of us to live holy lives amongst the people we live amongst through word, heart and action. Only then will we no longer be exiles.

This is amongst the reasons why I believe that the letter of 1 Peter is a letter of our time because it helps us to live as the people of God in a state where the powers that be are trying sweep Christians under the carpet or place them in exile where their voices are not heard despite the best efforts of groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby. This first section of the letter also spells out what we are chosen for which is to live out holy lives.

2. But why are we to live out holy lives?

Because of what God has done to save us. This is spelt out in very logical fashion in verses 18-21. Verse 18 reminds us what we were saved from. We were saved from an empty way of life which was handed down to you from your ancestors. Many scholars suggest that this book was written to Gentile Christians and the lifestyle of the Gentiles was without God much like many in the 21st Century. Hence the use of the word *empty*.

Hence also the use of the phrase *perishable things such as gold and silver* to say that material possessions especially precious ones cannot save you. So what or who can save us from this empty way of life? Listen to what verses 19 and 20 say, *"¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.* The blood of Jesus saves or redeems us from the past empty way of life that those had before Christ. This can also be described as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This shows again that God through Jesus has his hand in our salvation which is a good thing because there is no way we could ever save or redeem ourselves. But also, our salvation through Jesus was part of God's plan and this part of the plan was revealed to the readers when this letter was written **and** has been revealed to us before, during and after our decision to be a Christian. What now happens because we have been saved through the blood of Christ?

Listen to what verse 21 says, *"²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."* Because of what Christ has done, we believe or place our trust in God. But not only that our faith and hope are in God. Effectively, because of what God has done through Christ, we are here as people who have faith and hope in God. This is foundational to not only our existence but the church's existence wherever God places it.

3. What is the effect of what God has done on the church?

The people of God love each other. This is not driven from a human perspective but from obedience to the truth about God. This is spelt out at the beginning of verse 22 when we are told that the people Peter is writing to have purified themselves. This can also read that they have been purified through what God has done for them which sounds more accurate scripturally. This section means that God showed his love for them by purifying them through the blood of Christ.

The response of God's people – the church – is to show the same love God has for us to one another. What does that love look like? Well in verse 22, there are three adjectives that describe the love that we are to have for each other. These adjectives are: *sincere, deeply* and *from the heart*. Brothers and sisters in Christ! This is how God loves us. Isn't that wonderful to know? But! Here's the catch – God calls us to show sincere love to each other, love one another deeply and from the heart. Do we do that? If not, are we prepared to start doing that?

We need not just to start loving each other God's way, we have no choice as believers in Christ. Why? Because we have been born again as believers in Christ of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God. God's word is enduring through all of our lives and when it is working through us then we grow in our faith in God.

That is why in the 20 years I have been ordained, the people that grow in their faith more are the ones that are a part of a group that deeply study the living and enduring word of God, and I urge

you to join a Bible Study group once they get started. It is enduring because we are reminded in verse 24 that it lasts longer than grass and flowers. Flowers are seasonal and grass withers but that does not happen to the word of God. God's word endures forever in season and out of season.

This is the word that is preached to the people that the Spirit works with in the lives of people so that they come to be followers of Christ. So therefore, the effect on the church is that the people of God love each other and are people who have been born again through the living and enduring word of God. I hope and pray that we are all people who fit these categories. If not, there is still time to have the living hope that is promised in the first chapter of 1 Peter.

4. What does holiness look like in the lives of the individual?

Holiness means that we get rid of the bad stuff in our lives as well as do the good stuff. The bad stuff is mentioned in verse 1 of Chapter 2. *Malice* which involves the desire to hurt someone. *Deceit* which leads people on or is on a false path which takes people away from God. *Hypocrisy* which is saying something and doing the opposite. *Envy* which effectively is desiring things, or placing more importance on worldly things other than the things that God has given us which fits the setting of 1 Peter better. Lastly, *slander* of every kind and which is making false statements about a person or to a person or even talking about a person behind their backs because that leads to gossip.

All of these do not constitute holy behaviour, which is essentially behaviour that dishonours God and dishonours human beings. These behaviours need to be avoided if we are to follow this passage to live holy lives. How do we avoid behaviour like this? By craving pure spiritual milk as mentioned in verse 2 which will result in believers in Christ growing up in their salvation, which means once we are saved by Christ we grow into our faith, our relationship with God and ultimately, we grow in the way we live holy lives where God has placed us all because we have tasted that the Lord is good.

In conclusion

God says, "Be Holy because I am holy." Why?

Because we are chosen to live holy lives because of God's mercy upon us through what God has done for us.

As a church, we are to show our holiness to God by loving each other.

Lastly we are to get rid of unholy habits but also crave pure spiritual milk so that we grow in our salvation which means our faith in God **and** the living out of our faith in God grows deeper.

Let us live holy lives that express deep thanks to God from our hearts for saving us. Doing this will grow God's church in our segment of the Kingdom of God.