

Vicar Drew Thompson

"Lives of Holiness"

December 9, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. The sermon text this evening will be the epistle: 2 Peter 3:8-14.

A big topic of discussion this time of year is the *true* meaning of Christmas. Christmas isn't *really* about gifts and lights and Santa Claus, it's really about Jesus. He's the reason for the season you might say. I certainly appreciate the sentiment, but tonight I'm going to take it a step further. If Jesus' first advent has implication for how you should celebrate Christmas, Jesus' second advent has implications for the way we should live your entire life. Jesus' birth gives true and lasting meaning to the season, and his return should give true and lasting meaning to our lives.

So, where do you find meaning in life? People throughout history have searched for meaning in different places. The Greeks sought to do mighty deeds and be immortalized in myths, modernist thinkers have looked to science or human progress and the hope of a better future, but today, many give meaning to their life by pursuing some sort of personal goal.

Some people build wealth and get a great sense of security and accomplishment from this. Some build a reputation and comfort themselves with the knowledge that they are known and valued by other people because of their abilities. Some people create art and relish what they have contributed to the world. Some just build collections, storing up stamps or statistics

about a favorite football team. This is a short list, but ask yourself, what things give your life meaning?

The false teachers that Peter addresses in this letter acquired wealth, built up a reputation, and gorged their sexual appetite. But Peter's message to them and to us is this: It's all going to burn.

Peter is very clear, worldly pursuits that elevate the self are not lasting and will not stand on the day that heaven and earth pass away. Peter condemns such living from an eternal perspective. Because of God's promises concerning the second advent of Christ, he warns his Christian readers: Don't waste your lives on worldly ambition.

American novelist David Foster Wallace, who did not profess to be Christian, actually agrees with Peter. He said this during a commencement address: "Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it JC or Allah, be it YHWH or the Wiccan Mother Goddess, or the Four Noble Truths, or some inviolable set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive."

He goes on to list money, your own beauty, power, and intellect as things that eat us alive because they simply don't last. While Wallace doesn't recognize Jesus as the son of the one true God like Peter, he finds agreement with Peter in this: a life spend on selfish worldly ambition is a waste. Life must be about something greater than the individual.

So, if worldly ambition, or chasing pleasure, or indulging in leisure are not meaningful plans for living, what is? How shall we live? Peter answers the question in verse 11, eternally

significant lives are lives of holiness and godliness. When the heavens and earth are burned away lives of holiness will be the only thing that carry through.

Now, as I begin this topic of holy living, I want to be very clear: what Peter is talking about here is an issue of faithfulness not faith. What I mean is, you will be saved on judgement day not because of your faithfulness, not because of the holy deeds you've done or the holy person you have become, but only because the holiness of Christ has already been credited to you. I can confidently say to you today that in God's eyes you are pure and white as snow even while filth still clings to you, because this filth is concealed by the purity of Christ. We're all children of the street whose dirty rags have been covered by the royal coat of the king.

Peter writes to Christians in view of this reality. Knowing that by his grace alone God has declared us holy on account of Christ how shall we live? Shall we return to futile ways of living that will not stand in the judgment? Of course not! In view of what God has done, live a life of holiness and godliness.

Peter has given us a negative reason to pursue a life of holiness: to avoid seeing the fruits of our life ending up in the fire. Peter is not warning his reader that they won't be saved, but that they are at risk of watching all their efforts in life be reduced to ash. This is a negative reason: don't let this happen to you.

But let me give you a positive one: Strive after a life of holiness because it's the life you were made for. You were created with the purpose of walking with God and living according to his will. If you've ever wondered what God wants you to do with your life, here we have the

answer. When you pursue holiness and the things of God, you are finally doing what you were made for.

Now, Holiness can get a bad reputation. If you just search “holy” on Google images, you get pictures of sunrises, doves, and Justin Bieber who evidently has a song titled “holy”. Maybe you picture monks in a tower spending all their waking hours in meditation. Maybe you picture angels strumming harps on clouds. Maybe holiness just sounds too hard or too boring. But let me give you a different picture of the life of holiness: It’s a life guided by the Holy Spirit. A life abundant in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I don’t know about you, but that sounds like a terrific life to me. Not just because I know it’s how I should live but it’s how I want to live. Who doesn’t want more joy and more peace in their life? Imagine your relationship with your spouse, kids, or friends if you had a little more patience, a bit more kindness. Imagine your life with greater self-control, stronger faithfulness to God. Sin often seems fun, but it’s not near as fun as holiness.

Now, I don’t know how well or easily these fruits of the Spirit are manifest in your lives today, but I do know that it’s the life you were made for, it’s the life God has called you to live, and no matter your current state, the Holy Spirit is slowly transforming you into the creature you were created be. But as you know, even the most holy life lived on this earth will never expunge sin completely.

But I have good news. First, you are forgiven. When you pursue a life of holiness it opens your eyes to just how unholy you can be. Let this recognition of shortcoming drive you

not into despair or guilt but let it drive you to love your Lord Jesus all the more for what he has done for you.

Second good news, there is an end in sight. Not an end of all things, but an end to our sin and imperfection. While sin and death persist in this life, Peter directs us to hope in a new heaven and new earth where righteousness reigns supreme. The law of the land will be love and obedience to God, but you won't even need a law to instruct you because you will have been changed to the sort of person that loves without thinking. In heaven, the people of God will be like an orchestra perfectly in sync with their maestro. The maestro will sit back and delight in this orchestra he has created, and the orchestra will make music with such great joy, delighting in their maestro. Look forward to heaven where holiness is effortless.

In the fullness of time, Christ will come again, and all earthly things will pass away. So live lives of holiness, lives that bear meaningful fruit in this time and the next. And while you struggle here on earth, look forward to life in the new heaven and new earth: a holy life with the Holy One. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.