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The Beauty of Holiness by Ben S.

Introduction: Holiness isn't a word that is used very much outside of church. It often brings up an image of very religious, stuffy people looking down their noses whenever they have a suspicion someone somewhere is having a good time. Maybe Justin Bieber is changing that view of holiness for the younger generation with his song 'Holy'. "Runnin' to the alter like a track star, can't wait another second 'cause the way you hold me feels so holy." What is it like to be to be known, held, and loved by someone pure and beautiful? We might get a taster of that in a relationship with someone but it is just a pointer to what it is to be known by a perfectly pure and beautiful God. The 18th century theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote these words, "Holiness is a most beautiful, lovely thing. Men are apt to drink in strange notions of holiness from their childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour, and unpleasant thing; but there is nothing in it but what is sweet and ravishingly lovely. ...'tis a divine beauty." The Bible talks about 'the beauty of holiness'. JC Ryle (1816-1900) the Bishop of Liverpool wrote, "We must be holy, because this is the one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world." In 1Peter1:2 Peter addresses the believers as chosen, set apart and cleansed by the Holy Spirit through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Here and now, God is in the process of progressive sanctification. But we don't like being different or set apart. It's much easier to give in to the temptation to be like everybody else. But that is not who you are. If you believe in Christ you are set apart for Jesus. "Just as he who called you is holy, so, be holy in all you do." (Peter2:16)

What is Holiness? The Hebrew word for holiness is 'kadushah' meaning cut off, set apart, separate, exalted, above and beyond. It is off the scale of goodness, love, justice and mercy. There is none holy like the Lord. He is God and there is no other. We are not set apart *like* God, we are set apart *for* God. Holiness is so much more than morality, or keeping the rules. In Leviticus the tables, linen, pots, oil and pans were described as holy; exclusively set apart for worshipping God. We are to be wholly devoted to God's use in every area of our life: money, sex, work, intellect, processions, social media, relationships, bodies; everything.

Tim Keller's illustration of holiness comes from 2 Samuel 22. It's the story of the devotion of David's men who risk their lives for some water from the well in Bethlehem just because David sighs for it. David pours the water out before the Lord because he feels he is not worthy of that kind of devotion. The devotion of David's men is the kind of devotion that the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of. That is why when he calls us to share our money, forgive others, meet together in unity and share the gospel, it is not a question of how much can I get away with but how much more can I give to God and my neighbours. How can I be obedient?

What can we do to grow in holiness? Peter tells us to do some things in response to God's amazing mercy: **live in the light of the future** (v13), "With minds that are alert set your hope on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus returns." Be mentally ready for action. In Exodus 12:11 God tells the Israelites to be ready to follow the Lord at a moment's notice as they eat the Passover meal. We do not drift naturally into holiness. We have to roll up the sleeves of our minds and deliberately

set our hopes on the grace that will come to us when Jesus Christ returns with our inheritance. This place is not your ultimate home. Hold the things of this world with an open hand. The martyr Jim Elliot wrote, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose." Something better is coming. Think of the woman who in a holy act, poured out that expensive oil on Jesus' feet in preparation for his burial. To some it was a waste. To her it was holy devotion.

Then Peter says, **live in your family likeness.** (v14) "Do not conform to this evil world but be holy in all you do." Shape your life to the image of God. Remember the change Jesus brought to your life when you were born again to a living hope and a future inheritance. Be like your Father who is holy. How can we live in a way that contradicts our true identity in Christ? What do we need to get rid of to be more like our elder brother, Jesus Christ? Confess that specific sin to God. Ask what is the opposite of that specific sin? What virtue do I need to cultivate to grow in holiness? Ask God to help you. "In all your course, walk with God and follow Christ as a little poor helpless child, taking hold of Christ's hands, keeping your eye on the mark of the wounds on his hands and side, whence came the blood that cleanses you from sin. Hide your nakedness under the skirt of the white shining robe of his righteousness." (Jonathan Edwards)

Finally, **live in the fear of the Lord.** (v17) But doesn't 'perfect love casts out fear'? The Bible often says, "Do not fear" The fear of the Lord is not grudging obedience to God because we are afraid of him. A right fear of the Lord causes us to despise our sin and to want to be with God in all his awesome wonder. God will judge us one day but we do not live in terror of that day because in his great love for us, Jesus took our punishment. The judge of the world is now our heavenly Father and we are his children. We cannot live as we please. Sin has consequences. We reap what we sow. Our accountability to God stops us from living reckless lives. The fear of him helps us make wise choices. There was a group of young boys who had decided to do something wrong. One refused to join in. When asked why, he said it was because of his dad. They mocked as a coward who was afraid of his dad. He said he wasn't afraid of what his dad would do; he was afraid what it would do to his dad. He didn't want to disrespect the one person he loved and admired the most in the world. That's the fear of the Lord. We don't want to bring shame and disgrace to our Father. We respect him too much.

As a motivation for holiness let your mind marinate in these verses, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1Peter 1:18-19)