

Introduction

It seems impossible to understand true holiness, but if we do not, will we ever be full of joy as the Lord promised, because holiness and happiness belong together? Who can help us? It's time to take a good, long look at Jesus Christ.

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God's plan all along is that we would be whole, holy, and happy.

We have discovered that contrary to widespread belief, these words belong together. They belong together because we have learned that God is holy and the most joyful being in the universe. They belong together because we have learned that darkness, sin, unrighteousness, rebellion, whatever you want to call it, brings untold grief.

We also learned that holiness and wholeness work hand in hand. A holy life brings wholeness to us. Wholeness brings a holy life. And what do we mean by wholeness? We mean that sin has fragmented our lives. It has fractured the integrity of the image of Christ within us. But Christ has come to put the fractured pieces together. This is wholeness.

Before time began God chose us in Christ that we would be blameless and holy before him. Romans 8:29 picks up on this theme. Listen to this beautiful verse.

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Isn't that great? God chose us to become like Christ. This desire to make us like Christ was something God determined before time began. Your holiness and your happiness were predetermined. Throughout history God has been working out this purpose to create a holy people for his name in the world. It began with the nation of Israel.

Leviticus 20:26 - Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.

Deuteronomy 14:2 - For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

But we know Israel was far from holy. Israel so compromised itself that God repeatedly sent warnings to the nation through the prophets. But Israel refused. The prophet Isaiah compared the nation to a body that was sick on the inside and the out. Listen to these words from Isaiah 1:5-6.

Where will you be stricken again,
As you continue in *your* rebellion?
The whole head is sick

And the whole heart is faint.
From the sole of the foot even to the head
There is nothing sound in it,
Only bruises, welts and raw wounds,
Not pressed out or bandaged,
Nor softened with oil.

Isn't it interesting that God pictured their lack of holiness as a lack of health? We know also what God did to the sinful nation. God sent the Babylonians to destroy the nation. The capital city was destroyed, the temple of Solomon burned to the ground, and the nation sent into exile for its sin. How much fun was that? What did the sin of the people get them? Only grief, pain, sorrow, and death.

When Israel came back to the land, it tried again to be the holy people of God. Many good things happened. The city was rebuilt. The walls around the city raised up. The Temple was restored. But the nation made an opposite error. Rather than falling into the sin of idolatry, it fell into the sin of self-righteousness. Its leaders tried to itemize every feasible way a man could obey the Law of Moses. Its leaders tried to define every law down to microscopic level lest the people stray from God's law. But this alienated the people from the spirit of the Law. This frustrated people who did not have time to study as the scribes did and to remember the minutiae of the Law became an impossibility. For hundreds of years before the Babylonians there was licentiousness. For hundreds of years after the Babylonians there was legalism.

Would anyone ever get it right? What was holiness? What is holiness? Enter Jesus Christ. Do you want to see a holy and happy man? Take a good long look at Jesus. Remember the verse we read earlier – Romans 8:29. Remember how Paul described our predetermined destiny? He said that before time began God determined that we would be like Jesus Christ. That is what holiness is. Holiness is being like Jesus.

This is so important to realize because it is easy to substitute something else as our description of holiness. Ancient Israel substituted legalism for holiness. Today, the Church can substitute other things for the life of Christ – even good things. John Eldredge, in his book, *The Utter Relief of Holiness* mentioned four of them. First is Therapeutic Christianity. This is the kind of Christianity that has practical helps on every conceivable subject. It tells us how to fix our marriages, our children, and our finances. It tells us how to talk better and listen better. It tells us how to work better and play better. It gives us practical steps for everything. This is good. I applaud this, but a subtle danger is that Christianity is reduced to a series of fix-it steps for the normal things of life, and we can lose sight of God who is holy.

Then there is behavior Christianity. We are supposed to do this, but not that. It's OK to have this kind of entertainment, but we better not indulge in that. This can be good. I applaud this. One of the greatest problems in our time is followers of Jesus who openly embrace sinful behavior and don't seem to have much conviction about their sin. It is important that we refrain from sinful behavior. But a subtle danger is that Christianity is reduced to outward behavior and while a person can look good on the outside he may be a disaster on the inside and may have lost sight of God who is holy.

Third, we discover truth Christianity. This is the brand of the faith that makes sure we have all our doctrinal ducks lined up perfectly. Of course, this is important. The early church fathers spent their lives, generations of them, to define our faith accurately based upon the word of God. But the problem is that less important topics of the faith get thrown in with the most important topics of the faith – for example, will the rapture occur before the tribulation? Some make that a necessity to believe and you are a heretic if you don't. That is not as important as what happened on the cross when Jesus died. We all believe Jesus is coming again but the minute details of prophecy are not as important as confessing that Jesus rose again from the dead and is Lord of all. Yes, it is important that we be doctrinally correct, but we can subtly substitute propositions of truth for a relationship with the living God. Christianity becomes a theology textbook affair rather than intimacy with the living God. We can lose sight of God who is holy.

One more that Eldredge mentioned in his book is "Justice Christianity." This is the brand of the faith that has elevated human justice issues. These are critical issues – sex trafficking, abortion, the plight of immigrants, factory workers in foreign countries working in dangerous and intolerable conditions. These issues do matter and are important to God. But if we are not careful, we can lose sight of our relationship with the living God and become another watered-down version of social liberalism and lose the power of the Gospel. We can lose sight of God who is holy.

There are so many wrong descriptions! It seems impossible to understand true holiness and if we do not understand true holiness, then we ask, "will we ever be full of joy as the Lord promised?", because, after all, holiness and happiness belong together. Who can help us? Enter Jesus Christ. He is our help because to look at him is to look at the face of God and to look at him is to look at what man was supposed to be like from the beginning. Remember, all of us are to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Holiness, in its simplest definition, is being like Jesus.

Today and in our next broadcasts I will give you a portrait of Jesus. Let me start with this thought, "the sinners in Jesus day loved him." That statement alone should cause us to stop and think long and hard about the kind of holiness we present to the world. When I talk about sinners in Jesus' time, some may ask, "Who are you talking about? Isn't everyone a sinner?" The answer of course is yes. Every person, save Jesus himself, is a sinner, but I am talking about those people identified in the story of Jesus as "sinners," i.e., their turmoil on the inside was matched by their behavior on the outside.

The religious people called them sinners, but the difference between them and their own was that the religious leaders seemed to have it pretty well together on the outside. But Jesus knew better. He said they were full of dead men's bones. Jesus indicated that they were worse off than those who were given the label of sinners. Those who had the label were women such as the prostitutes. The "men sinners" were the tax collectors who collected taxes from their Jewish brethren to pay either Herod or the Romans. They were all despised.

Yet these are the one that Jesus came for. He came for the religious sinners too, but it was much harder for them to recognize their spiritual bankruptcy before God. The prostitutes and tax collectors already knew it, and when they sensed that Jesus had not come to condemn but to save and restore, they flocked to him. When they learned that holiness was not a matter of figuring out

the minutiae of the Law but the simplicity of loving God and loving one's neighbor, they knew they were in the presence of life, joy, and spiritual health.

Here is the main takeaway for this. *People were attracted to Jesus.* Jesus was sinless. He was holy. He was perfect, yet sinners were attracted to his character.

We are going to take a closer look at Jesus in our next broadcasts. We are going to see how he operated and if we can get some clues for our lives as we pursue the happiness of holiness.