

A Call to Holiness
Revelation 22:6-9
2/28/2016

Holiness is a very unpopular concept today. It is almost as if the word “holiness” is from a foreign language. What is holiness? The 19th century pastor John Brown defines it this way: “Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervours, or uncommanded austerities (that means being like a monk, LK); it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills.” Or, to put it another way, holiness is loving what God loves, and hating what God hates. This is different from the world, and that fact is why the word “holiness” literally means “set apart.” Our passage today calls us to holiness for four reasons. The first reason is that God's Word is trustworthy and true, and therefore we can know what God loves and what He hates. The second reason is He is coming soon, and therefore we should be ready. The third reason is that God pronounces blessed those who keep the words of the book. And the fourth reason is that holiness means that we worship the only true God, for it is only as we worship the one true God that we will think as God thinks and will as God wills. Let us take these reasons one at a time.

But before we do that, we need to take a look at where we are in the book of Revelation. As we said last time, verses 1-5 of chapter 22 are the final verses of the visions that John sees. The rest of chapter 22 consists of the “so what?” of the whole book. So, what difference does it make to have seen all these visions, or read John's descriptions of all these visions? The rest of chapter 22 consists of short sections of exhortations that all end with some form of the promise that Jesus is coming soon. That is the anchor of the chapter: Jesus is coming soon. Therefore, we must be ready for His second coming. In terms of our passage, His Second coming is one of the reasons why we are called to holiness.

The first reason for holiness is that God's word is trustworthy and true, and therefore we can know what God loves and what He hates. It would be terrible, would it not, if we were called to be or do something, but we weren't told how or why? God does not work that way, however. He doesn't leave us in the dark. He calls us to holiness, and He tells us how and why.

God tells us through His infallible Word. The angel is telling John that God's words are trustworthy and true. It is fairly easy to believe that when we are looking at John 3:16. It is a bit more difficult to believe that when God is telling us to do or be something that is not what we are doing or being right now. Is God trustworthy and true when He is telling us that a way of doing things we have always thought was right is actually wrong? Is God trustworthy and true when He promises something in the future, but we haven't the foggiest idea of what it will look like? When we ask the question, the solution always comes back to what kind

of a God we serve. If He is a trustworthy God, then what He says is also trustworthy. Has God ever promised anything and then reneged on that promise? Has God ever promised something and then forgotten what he promised? Has God ever promised something, and then done the opposite? No, we have a completely trustworthy God. He always does what He says he will do. He always keeps His promises. Therefore, His Word is also trustworthy. It is this God Who superintended the writings of the prophets. That is why He is called “the God of the spirits of the prophets.”

So, in this trustworthy and true Bible, God has revealed what He loves and what He hates. He loves a broken spirit and a contrite heart. He loves those who humble themselves and repent of sin. He loves those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Above all, He loves those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord hates all wickedness, lying, cheating, stealing, fornicating, adultery, homosexuality, pride, idolatry, murder, envy, jealousy, unrepentance, and most of all, unbelief. So, the trustworthy Word of God tells us what God loves and what God hates. The question for us, therefore, is simple: do we love what God loves, and hate what God hates? In your Bible reading, look especially for these kinds of things, so that you can learn what to hate and what to love. That is crucial to becoming more holy.

The second reason we should be holy is that Jesus is coming soon. As Jesus says elsewhere, blessed are the servants who are doing what their master commanded them to do when the master comes back. When you are tempted to sin, think of it this way: is this something you would want to be found doing when Christ comes back?

Verse 7 starts out with the familiar word “behold.” This word is a word of emotion. It puts you into the emotional place where John was when he received the message. It means “sit up and take notice!” If you were asleep before, says John, wake up now. It is a word that is supposed to bring you up short, sort of like the German word “Achtung!” It is a strong way of saying, “your attention please.” So, we need to sit up and take notice whenever we see that word. It doesn't just mean “look at this.”

Jesus says that He is coming quickly, or soon. What time does He call soon? As Aslan would say, He calls all times soon. He could come back at any time. He could come in the next five minutes. Or it could be a long ways off. How are we supposed to think of that word “soon?” We should be behaving as though we expect Him to come in the next five minutes. If you were going to receive the Queen of England in the next five minutes at your home, what would you be doing for the next five minutes? Probably scrambling to try to make yourself and your house look presentable! It is that same kind of urgency that we are commanded to have. Live in constant expectancy of Christ's return. So, because God's word is faithful and true, and because Christ is coming quickly, we should become holy

people.

Thirdly, we should be holy because God has promised a great blessing on those who keep the words of the prophecy of this book. Of course, it is not just Revelation that Jesus is here talking about. He is talking about the whole of Scripture. The phrase “keep the words” refers not just to meditating on and internalizing God's Word, but also acting on it. It means the same thing as “honoring the words.” What is the nature of this blessing? It cannot be salvation. We know from countless other passages in Scripture that we do not obtain salvation blessings by means of obedience. So, what does it mean? As we have said before, there are rewards over and above salvation that will be given to Christians in the new heavens and the new earth. It seems quite clear that those blessings, which are well worth waiting for, and working to obtain, will be the blessings that Christians receive for honoring God's Word.

The last reason why we should become more holy is that worshiping the only true God means that we will become like Him. Verses 8-9 give us the negative example of John falling down in order to worship an angel. Now, this happened once before, in chapter 19. Plainly, if John the Apostle can fall prey to this temptation not once but twice, then we need to be very careful indeed not to worship false gods.

We should not worship angels any more than John should not worship angels. Angels today are a very much misunderstood topic. People think of them as little babies with wings. Or they think of them as guardian angels, one guardian angel per person. Or they think of them as what people turn into once they are in heaven. All of these ideas are wrong and unscriptural. Hebrews tells us that angels are ministering spirits. Their job is ministry to people. Occasionally, that does involve physical protection from harm, but it isn't just one angel. The Lord God sends all His angels to protect His people. Angels are purely spiritual. That is, they have no physical body at all, unlike us. Right now, angels have a higher status than we do. However, that will change in the new heavens and the new earth. Paul tells us in one of his letters that we will judge angels. We will have a higher rank than angels, eventually. God did not make angels in His own image. God did not send His Son to die for angels. Angels are not adopted into God's own family. In other words, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have higher privileges than angels. To say that someone will become an angel when they die is actually to give them a lower status, not a higher status.

Nevertheless, they are mighty beings, exceedingly powerful. Not only that, but John might have confused this angel with Jesus Christ Himself. In Scripture, Jesus sometimes takes the form of an angel in order to appear to human beings. So, let us not be too hard on the Apostle John. At least he is brutally honest about his own failings. By the way, can you imagine someone trying to write a false version of God's Word, and including in that false version his own failings? It is

hardly likely. A forgerer would have left out his own failings in order to try to convince people of his own authority.

The angel corrects John very clearly by saying that he (the angel) is closer to John than he is to Jesus Christ. In three ways is the angel closer to John. He is a fellow servant, and he is a fellow prophet, and he is a fellow keeper of the words of the prophecy. Of course, Jesus Christ can be said to be a prophet, and He certainly kept the words of the prophecy. However, Jesus did so as the Son of God and the perfect man. The angel is clearly putting some distance between himself and Jesus. It is the distance between Creator and creature.

So, what should we take away from this? Obviously, the command is for us to be holy as God is holy. Now, we cannot be holy unless God enables us. God does this for us in two ways. Firstly, God changes our nature from the inside out. Whether you want to call it new birth, or regeneration, it is a change that the Holy Spirit makes in us so that we are set apart from the world, and so we start to think like God, and we start to imitate God as well. In addition to that, we worship God, which is the very quickest way, incidentally, to become like God. If you want to become like God, the fastest way to do that is to worship Him. We become like what we worship.

The second thing God does for us that enables us to become holy is that He dwells inside us by His Holy Spirit. So, instead of acting on our sinful nature all the time, our behavior starts to change. This is based on the new birth, although it is slightly different. We are, therefore, not left alone to fend for ourselves, when it comes to being holy as God is holy. This is indeed a very happy thing for us, for without God's help, we can do nothing.

However, this also means that we must put forth effort when God enables us. The very word "enable" should give us the clue here. There is an obstacle in the way of our holiness, which God has now removed. We can become more holy. We are no longer totally depraved in the same sense that we were before regeneration. Do we still sin? Yes. However, the Holy Spirit has come into our lives and fundamentally changed our nature. We are no longer enslaved to it. Therefore, we must put forth an effort to achieve godliness, always relying on God's strength. And that effort should have the same urgency (actually much more!) that we would have when learning that someone important is coming to our house. Holiness is, as John Brown said, thinking the way that God does: loving what God loves, and hating what God hates. May we become like Him.