

Sunday Mar. 14, 2021
Lesson 2: Nourishing Holiness
Scripture: 1 Peter 2: 1-17

Context:

The next part of our section on holiness comes from the New Testament in the book of First Peter. The purpose of the lesson is to embrace God's call to live and grow as God's holy people. As we look at the letter, we learn how scripture helps us to grow in grace and holiness.

In the previous sections of First Peter, the author focuses on dynamics within the community. Relationships are important to the community as they help the people to rejoice in the unexpected grace of God.¹ A central motif of this passage is reborn children as the formation of a transformation in the believer's life.² As one reads the passage, one might wonder why this motif plays such a prominent role.

Evidence from the time and the setting of the letter shows us a glimpse of dynamics going on in the early church community. As there are several themes of separation from ancestral traditions and the exhortation to be obedient children in the new household of God, some scholars suggest the churches were a conversionist sect and those coming into the sect were trying to figure out how to break ties and form new ones.³ There were of course tensions and conversations about how the community should go forward into the future.

The passage today begins with a focus on the life of a newborn baby. Just as a baby is nourished by their mother, those who belong to Christ are now called to get rid of all the remaining vestiges of a life where there was deceit, pretense, envy, and slander. These things are not nourishing and do nothing for the good of the community.

Pulling from the psalms, the author then addresses the community of faith as stones along with Christ who is the cornerstone. The statements mark how the building that is built up as God's work, a spiritual and not a human reality.⁴ Using this Jewish allusion, First Peter seeks to integrate an understanding of how God's holy people are extended to the Gentiles.⁵ The people are given encouragement of how they belong to God and are now God's people. They once had not received mercy, but now they have received mercy and they belong to God and a community of faith.

¹ PHEME PERKINS, "First and Second Peter, James, and Jude," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 40.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

Application

Any time someone becomes a part of a new community, there is always the question of how they will change and how their old practices will tie into new ones. Anyone who has moved or welcomed someone into a community knows there is always an adjustment, a time where people search for identity and meaning.

Much like the early Christian community addressed in First Peter, at times we all become newborn babies even at different stages of life. We realize certain behaviors never get us where we need to be in life. We discover how the practices of deceit, pretense, envy, and slander ultimately lead to us being empty and without community.

Instead, God calls us to a life of holiness. Like a newborn baby, our nourishment is coming to the Word and seeing the behaviors God would like for us to possess in this life. Lying, even little white lies, add up and cause pain when people discover the truth. Having an open mind allows us to see different perspectives. Being envious leads us to miss the blessings we have in front of us. Slandering only results in all parties feeling hurt and broken.

What God wants for us is to be like that of living stones to be a part of a spiritual temple. Christ is the cornerstone, the one to hold it all together. We are the stones connected to him and called to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. We are the ones redeemed, called out of darkness, and are God's people now and forever.

The rich allusions in these scripture passages reminds us of the different ways God reaches out to us so we may grow as disciples of Christ. We are reminded of how the journey is an ongoing one, where as we pour into the Word and reflect up on it, we continuously grow. Just like milk, the more we consume, the stronger we become.

One of the things I have learned about in having a new nephew is how little ones can teach us how to pursue the things we truly need in this life. When he is hungry, he cries out to his mother knowing exactly what he needs to function. It is primary instinct to cry out for what he needs and to be fed.

As Christians, I often wonder what it would look like if in times of need, we paused for a moment to read scripture and reflect on passages such as what we have read today. It is a lot easier to speak our opinion, to string out words instead of reflect on what we read. Silence and meditation over the Word is hard and it is even harder to follow it.

Just this morning I was mulling over different things, forming opinions in my mind and having comebacks to imaginary conversations. It was then and there that I paused to have my devotion time even though I wanted to look at Twitter or read a blog. I settled into the chair, recited the prayers of the morning, and turn to the scripture.

Lo and behold, there were scripture verses to help me process things in my mind and remind of how there is nourishing milk for my soul in God's Word. While it may challenge and even provoke me, it also encourages and consoles me. As I come to ponder upon the Word, I find the story of how I am never alone as God has chosen me, both a sinner and a living stone for God.

In the season of Lent, we are encouraged to discern the spiritual practices to tie us back to God. Today, we are reminded of the power of God's Word and how it applies to our lives everyday. While there are other things we think may nourish us: the news, social media, our own internal voices; the true thing to remind us of our calling and purpose is the good news found in God's Word.

What are new practices you have found when you have been a part of different Christian communities? Why do you think it is so important to read God's Word to speak into your life? How do you think God's Word can be nourishing to your soul even when it challenges you? What practices of scripture reading will you undertake in the season of Lent?

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