

A Holy Nation

by Richard E. Bieber

Richard E. Bieber's sermon emphasizes the call for Christians to live as a holy nation, reflecting God's holiness in their conduct and relationships.

Scripture: Psalm 111:10, Isaiah 6:1, Matthew 17:1, John 14:15, Hebrews 12:28, James 1:22, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Holiness Of God", "Christian Living"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of holiness, drawing from Peter's journey of recognizing the holy through encounters with Jesus. He emphasizes that a lack of holiness blinds us to God's presence and power, highlighting the need for reverence and awe in the Church. Bieber contrasts the early Church's respect for God's holiness with the current state of 'Churchianity,' urging believers to live as a holy nation touched by God. He stresses that true holiness begins with the fear of God and obedience to His Word, leading to sincere love for one another and authenticity in living out a holy life.

Transcript

"...as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all of your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

1 Peter 1: 15-19

In the early days of his discipleship Peter had a hard time recognizing the holy. Something had to hit him over the head before he realized he was standing on holy ground.

When Jesus came and asked to use his boat; Peter was flattered that this popular teacher would want to use his boat. But Peter did not see Jesus as holy until the net came up loaded with fish. Suddenly, he understood and fell on his face.

At the Mount of Transfiguration; Peter sees Jesus' countenance shining like the sun, his radiance giving off an unearthly light. But he doesn't "get it"--he keeps right on talking -- until the cloud overshadows them, and Peter hears a terrifying voice, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, listen to him."

It's almost as if God had to say, "Peter, shut up."

The reason Peter had such a hard time discerning the holy was that Peter himself was unholy. Peter was not immoral, but Peter was full of himself. And when we are full of ourselves, we are blind to the holy.

And yet, by the time Peter came to write his epistles, he was a different man. In Peter's epistles, as almost nowhere else in Scripture, there is an atmosphere of awe for the holy God pervading everything.

"As he who called you is holy, so be holy in all your conduct."

"For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

"We were with him on the holy Mount" ... Peter understands now and teaches us that everything God touches, everything that belongs to God...is holy.

If you want to know why the church at this hour is so weak...why there is a gaping difference between the New Testament church and the church of this hour, don't waste time trying to study organizational structures.

People think that if they set up the church with the proper elders, they will have an "apostolic church." If the worship is structured (or unstructured) in the proper way the Spirit will begin to move with power. It does not work that way.

Where the atmosphere of the holy pervades the Church, God's presence fills the Church.

Where the sense of the holy is missing, God's presence and power are missing. From the Day of Pentecost until this moment, where the church loses its vision of the holy, it loses its vision of God.

We can chase all over the world looking for "power", but God's redemptive power is never safe in the hands of people who don't know how to take off their shoes on holy ground.

The difference between the Church of the New Testament era and the present-day church of "Churchianity" is that the early Church had a healthy respect for God's holiness; they trembled at God's Word, whereas we nit-pick and argue. And they bent their necks before God's commands, while we hold ours stiff.

The apostolic church had doors wide open (far wider than our doors) accepting anybody who stumbled in. All kinds of troubled, sin-stained souls came. The dregs of society poured in, and as the Word of God was proclaimed, everybody rejoiced. Nobody was turned away.

Of course, when a man or woman would then rise up and enter the door to the kingdom of heaven, and put on the new robe of God's righteousness, then that life had to be conformed to the will of God. Once they were committed disciples, they were held to a high standard, and if they ignored that standard, they were sent away. The Church did that without batting an eyelash.

Ananias and Sapphira committed what would now be considered a rather minor sin--a slight twisting of the truth. But they had in fact lied to the Holy Spirit as a man and woman, who were already in the kingdom of God. They died on the spot.

The unnamed man in 1 Corinthians 5, had a "thing" going with his stepmother, not too unusual an occurrence in Corinth in those days. That would have been overlooked if he were a seeker. Let him come and seek. Never mind what goes on back home. But this man was a believer. He knew the Truth. And he had the audacity to continue to live that kind of life---and still come into the fellowship praising God? Paul wrote, "Turn that man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

So the question is: What does God see when he looks over our assembly? Does he see a holy nation? Are we living as people who have been touched by the Living God? Are we living as people whose bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit?

--the words that come out of our mouths...

--the thoughts that go through our minds...

--the imagination of our hearts...

--the things we do, or fail to do...

Are we living in God's marvelous light -open and unashamed before him?

There are people who are quick to say, "Well, I'm in the open. I'm not ashamed of anything I'm doing. My life is an open book before God. God understands where I'm coming from."

Such are easy words to say and sound frank and sincere. But when God turns on the light of his Spirit, and causes the beam to come right into your heart--to a place where you know you are displeasing him, like that grudge you're holding onto--and you stand there without blinking, are you truly frank and sincere or are you simply so full of yourself that you can't recognize the holy?

God has been telling you to bring that thing to the cross, confess it, and bury it under the blood. But you didn't even take off your shoes in his presence. You should have been on your face!

Instead, you offer to "do God a favor" to get him off the track. "Lord, I'm going to build you a temple right here in my living room. I'm going to convert my fireplace into a chapel."

God says, "Heaven is my throne. Earth is my footstool. What kind of house are you going to build for me? What's the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made. So they are mine, says the Lord."

"But what is the man to whom I will look? He who is humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word."

Where are the saints who tremble at God's word? Where are the people who know how to fall on their faces before God's glory? Who confess the sin God puts his finger on instead of pretending not to see it?

Who stop when God says stop?

And go when God says go?

When you find such people, you are looking at God's holy nation.

Where trembling before God's word is lacking, people can call themselves by any pious name they choose, they have no part or lot in God's kingdom.

So you think you're holy because you don't drink, smoke, or play cards?

You think you're holy because you have disengaged yourself from the unclean "institutional church"?

You think you're holy because the only mode of transportation you own is a bicycle?

You think you're holy because you see visions or speak in tongues, or prophesy?

The holiness God is calling for has nothing to do with how we think we compare with other saints.

Holiness begins with the fear of God.

How is Jesus ever going to be able to say, "Rise, have no fear!" until we first learn with Peter, James, and John to fall on our faces?

Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" ...meaning "Let thy name be kept holy by me." Forget about trying to make everyone else honor God's name--you honor it!

When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on the throne high and lifted up, and heard the seraphim shouting, crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts", Isaiah did not pull out his pocket camera and start taking pictures--he melted with dread. "Woe is me, for I am undone! for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

"O, but I don't fear God, I love God!" You don't know the first thing about the love of God until you learn to fear him.

May God show us who we are dealing with when we use the name of Jesus. "Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days that I may know how frail I am and tremble before your glory."

Holiness is to listen to Jesus Christ.

"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased...never mind what you think about him. I am pleased with him, so listen to him!"

How can a heart be trembling at the word of Jesus if we continue to persist in the sin that he has already spoken to us about? How can I go on in that lie?

How can I continue to hold that hatred in my heart underneath my pretended smiles?

How can I go around bad-mouthing every other fellowship in town except mine?

Are we listening to what Jesus is saying or are we busy trying to get everyone to listen to us?

"The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen shall live."

Who hear! Who open their ears and bring their lives into conformity to what I say.

Now if you are not sure it is Jesus speaking to you, don't act. Don't go off half cocked. If you are not sure who's doing the talking, wait until you know.

But the minute you know it's Jesus, listen and obey.

Holiness is to have a sincere and God-fearing love for brothers and sisters.

"Having purified your souls," says Peter, "by your obedience to the truth, through a sincere love of brethren, love one another earnestly from your heart."

A sincere love: a love that goes on through storms, and lasts more than a year and a half.

Many times God has to deal with us and has to say to us:

"Love that brother. You're getting stubborn."

"Love that sister. You're holding a grudge."

The minute God speaks to us, we have no choice, but to say, "Yes, Lord", and do it.

When you walk into a house where God is held in awe, there you will always find love. Not just talked love, but lived love--where people honor each other. And respect each other, care about each other, and help each other.

When you come to a city where the saints of God truly hold God in awe, there you will find a love that runs deep enough that these people can work together in harmony.

Finally, holiness--to be holy is to be real.

A holy man or woman doesn't put holiness in their voice, or in their face. It's not about making people so uncomfortable that they have to hide their beer when you approach.

Holiness is to be out in the light. So they don't have to be afraid that you have some "spiritual ace" hidden in your pocket to throw it down on the table. No hidden agenda. No devious plan.

If you are truly living in the fear of God, you are delivered from the fear of man. You can be yourself. You can be the person that Jesus saved and knows. If Jesus knows my heart, why should I worry about everybody else's opinion? If I'm walking with him what more do I need?

The word of the Spirit to all of us at this hour is, "Be holy for I am holy". He is speaking, not to one or two "super saints," but to the entire Body of Christ in the place where we happen to be. We are called to be a Holy Nation.

And God is able to make us what he calls us to be if we will answer that call with hearts that tremble at his words.

May God help us to get our eyes off all our "achievements" and on to his Son.

May God help us to answer his call for a holy life at this critical hour.

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