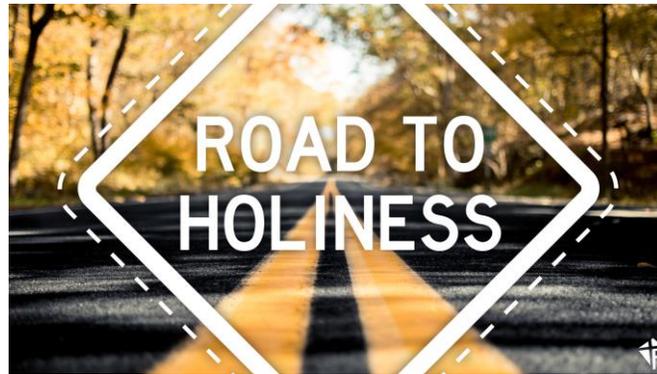


2021 Spring Spiritual Growth Emphasis



Part 1: "What Kind of People Should We Be?"

I'm very excited this morning to kick-off with you our 2021 Spring Spiritual Growth Emphasis. I've been looking forward to this for a quite a while now. A lot of prayer has already preceded this day and we're going to start our time together with prayer in a moment.

- Please be in prayer for the Corry Family who have Covid
- READ 2 Peter 3:10-12
- PRAY

Background (Notes)

The apostle Peter wrote two books or epistles in the New Testament, 1 Peter, with the theme of helping suffering believers, and 2 Peter with the theme of exposing false teachers.

Peter wrote his last epistle while in a Roman prison near the end of his life. Shortly after writing it, he was martyred by being crucified upside down in about 67 A.D.

Here in chapter 3 of his second epistle, Peter is concerned that all followers of Christ have a proper understanding and response to the return of Jesus Christ. False teachers had been attacking this teaching and he wanted to set the record straight.

And so, this is what is on his mind as he wraps up his thoughts and words. One commentator had this to say about Peter's closing words...

“With the little remaining strength at his disposal, Peter grips his quill more tightly and with a firmer hand writes upon the parchment the final words in his faithful attempt to strengthen His Christian brethren. The sands in the hourglass of time are slipping away. Soon brutal hands will drag him away to the cursed tree where he will be crucified.”

Those final words begin right here in the verses we read a moment ago. Peter had just made it clear that Jesus is coming. Let's look back quickly at what he wrote in the first part of this chapter. READ 2 Peter 3:1-10

Peter uses two interesting and maybe confusing phrases here. First he says “the day of the Lord is coming like a thief”. What is the “day of the Lord”? The day of the Lord is a term of God's judgment on sin.

It's a term of destruction and damnation. It refers to the final ending of earth and its history of sin and evil. We don't look forward to the day of the Lord. But we do look forward to what happens AFTER it.

After the day of the Lord comes the day of God. Look at verse 12 again (READ).

You see, we wait for, we look forward to the day of God – that future time when God will create a new heaven and a new earth – the eternal heaven and home God is making for all His people. If you're looking forward to that day, say "Amen".

That is something that we all should be longing for and preparing for and allowing to shape how we live today. So with his last written words that have been preserved by the Spirit of God for believers of all ages, Peter says...

"If you're anticipating the return of Jesus Christ, and then the final judgment of God on sin and sinners and this world, and if you're waiting for the coming of the great day of God when the eternal state will be our eternal home...

Then let me tell you what kind of people you ought to be NOW, in light of these events that are coming. Let me tell you how the reality of these end times events should impact how you live RIGHT NOW."

He says in verse 11, "it is CLEAR what sort of people you should be...". Peter is straight up issuing a challenge to every born-again child of God in his day, and now this morning in our day, to conform our lives to the reality of eternity.

We spent 40 Days studying Revelation last fall. We've spent 40 days studying the book of Daniel this winter. Those two books are the primary books in the entire Bible detailing end times and prophetic events.

We may not understand every prophetic declaration these books make, but we understand what's going to happen next – the rapture of Jesus Christ, taking the church out of the world to be with Himself in heaven.

We understand that there is coming a time of tribulation such as the world has never seen when the antichrist will rule the world in absolute power. We learned a lot about the Antichrist in the closing chapter of Daniel.

We understand that we are already witnessing signs right now that correlate to what the Bible says the tribulation is going to include. Things like...

- a one-world government and one world economy – as I speak an entity called The World Economic Forum is trying to initiate the Great Reset which will strip individual nations of their rights in favor of a one-world system.

Their plan is to dismantle capitalism in favor of global socialism, abolishing private property, and private transportation. And we see this happening through the push for the New Green Deal by congressional leaders right now. If this so called “new deal” ever passes legislation, even home gardens could be outlawed.

The plan is also about inclusiveness, with everyone being equal and secure. To do this, basic human rights have to be abolished in favor of government control.

And now as we look back over the last year this philosophy has taken huge steps forward through the Covid pandemic and our newly elected president who just this week said that the amendments in our nation's constitution aren't absolute – amendments which were for the most part based on the Bible and Judeo-Christian values.

But if they're not absolute, then they can be changed and if they're changed then we will no longer possess the guiding principles that made America the greatest nation on earth. And without those, America will decline into godlessness and obscurity.

We need to pray for our president and the leaders in the white house and congress. We're going to do that together in about month on the National Day of Prayer. But let's pause for a moment and do that right now.

PRAY

You've also heard about The Equality Act. This godless piece of legislation threatens human life through abortion. It threatens children in the foster and adoption care systems. It threatens religious freedom, parental rights and much more. (FULL REPORT @ THE TOWER)

This week did bring some good news here in Iowa. The Iowa Senate, joining the House of Representatives, passed the Protect Life Amendment which will hopefully lead to returning the Iowa

Constitution to its original abortion-neutral status. (this is a first step with several more to go).

Then there's the push for what is called CRT: Critical Race Theory. CRT is a worldview rooted in Marxism and postmodern philosophy that is opposed to the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus.

It separates individuals into groups based on race and pits them against one another in order to overthrow societies, with race as an excuse for anarchy and revolution.

The most well-known movement that proposes CRT is of course the Black Lives Matter movement, but there are many others. And it's coming to a school near you – in fact it's already influencing our public schools even here in Norwalk.

Parents, you especially need to be in the know about Critical Race Theory. (FULL REPORT AT THE TOWER that includes how to pray about what is happening).

Other signs of the Tribulation that we're already seeing at least the beginnings of...

- a one-world religion
- an increase in persecution of people who refuse to accept these realities, especially Christians
- evil and lawlessness increasing
- a decrease in personal freedom – especially religious freedom

- a decline in morality and godlessness

Right here in America every year the number of Americans who attend and are part of a local church declines, it's at it's lowest point right now at about 25%.

Olive Tree Ministries (Jan Markel) recently highlighted an article that came out in the Los Angeles Times entitled, "Why America's Record Godlessness is Good News for the Nation."

In the article it says, and I quote, **"The secularization of U.S. society – the waning of religious faith, practice and affiliation – is continuing at a dramatic and historically unprecedented pace. While many may consider such a development as a cause for concern, such a worry is not warranted. This increasing godlessness in America is actually a good thing, to be welcomed and embraced.**

This secularization is a progressive force for good, one that is associated with improved human rights, more protections for planet Earth, and an increased socio-cultural propensity to make this life as fair and just as we can in the here and now – rather than in a heavenly reward that fewer and fewer of us believe in."

Jesus said in Luke 18...

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"When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:7-8

That's a good question!!! You can find this information at the tower in the lobby. (HANDOUT)

Franklin Graham, president of the Billy Graham Association writes,

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“I have no doubt that the cancel culture, which is empowered and animated by a worldview that is antithetical to the Christian faith, will only intensify. The media, especially social media, will be further emboldened to suppress the voices of Biblical morality that threaten the immoral cultural narrative. But believers should never be caught off guard by the culture around us – the culture of the world system behind which lies the evil one. Our message should always be to be ready to speak the truth of God’s Word.” ~ Franklin Graham

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Book: We Will Not Be Silent (Available in Fellowship Café)

Fellowship, in light of the fact that all these signs point to the reality that we are getting closer and closer to...

- the return of Christ and the 7 year tribulation that follows
- the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation,
- His thousand-year reign here on this earth,
- The following judgment of God on sinners called the Great White Throne judgement,
- The destruction of this present earth and heaven and the creation of a new heaven and earth where we will worship and serve Jesus Christ forever...

Since all these things are clearly before us, Peter says here in verse 11 that it is clear what sort of people we should be! I love the Amplified version of this verse...

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“Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be [in the meantime] in holy behavior [that is, in a pattern of daily life that sets you apart as a believer] and in godliness [displaying profound reverence toward our awesome God].” (Amplified Bible)

2 Peter 3:11

NOW more than ever before, is the time to reject worldly living and adopt holiness. NOW more than ever before, is the time to remember that the Scriptures make it clear that we are aliens in this world, we are not part of the world and its system.

We are strangers, foreigners, in this world. This world is NOT our home. We don't love the world or the things that are in the world. We are citizens not of a temporary kingdom, but an eternal kingdom – the kingdom of God.

We belong in another place, a heavenly place where there is no sin, no evil. A place created and prepared by God for all those who know and love Him and are looking forward to being with Him forever.

Our belief in God and His Word and what it says about the past, the present and the future of the world, of sinners and saints, of the reality of hell and the glories of heaven, this belief compels us to be people of holy character and godly lives.

Peter uses two terms here in verse 11...

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HOLY CONDUCT = Actions (the way I live – my behavior)

GODLINESS = Attitudes (the spirit by which I live – my heart)

God through Peter is stressing to us that the kind of people we ought to be in light of what He has revealed is coming, is people whose actions and behavior reflect the holy character of the God we know and serve...

And people whose attitudes and heart reflect a reverence for and a commitment to God, a God who has saved us from sin, redeemed us, equipped us and left us here to be His witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Both of these terms here – holy conduct and godliness – are untranslatable from the Greek to the English language. But the Greek words for these terms means that holiness and godliness should be spread out over every area of our life.

e.g. Ever been sprayed by a skunk? I haven't, but Pastor Adam has!

Holiness and godliness is like being sprayed by a skunk – it should permeate everything about our lives. God’s invasion of our soul through salvation should be so complete and thorough that no area of our lives no matter how small should go untouched or unchanged.

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“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

All this happens at salvation, but it’s up to us if it stays that way. WE determine if holy conduct permeates every area of our life and if godliness takes over all our attitudes and our heart.

You decide if once you are declared holy by God through salvation that holiness becomes your way of living so that through you, through your example of holiness, through your example of godliness, others come to know Jesus as through your lifestyle and your words.

Again, these are Peter’s final words. He’s about to be crucified upside down at his own request. He felt unworthy to be crucified like Jesus, so he requested to be crucified upside down, which the Romans gladly did.

So he says in essence, “We’re heading for glory. What kind of people should be in light of this reality? We should be people whose lives are completely permeated with the glowing odor of holiness in every area of our lives, all of which flows from a heart of godliness that is reflected in our attitudes.”

Peter had addressed this important theme back in his first epistle. Turn back to 1 Peter chapter 1...

READ 1 Peter 1:13

“...with your minds ready for action” – that’s the outward behavior of holiness...

“...be sober-minded” – that’s the inward heart and attitude of godliness

So God wants us to make sure our behavior, our conduct is right – it’s holy, and to make sure our attitude, our heart is right – it’s godly. Holiness and godliness make the way for us to “set our hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”.

How’s your hope this morning? Is it set on the coming of Jesus Christ when the fullness of God’s grace to us will be experienced by everyone who knows Christ as Savior?

Look at verse 14 (READ)...

God wants us to follow Him in obedience to the new life He called us to at salvation. It’s a life that leaves behind doing the sinful things we did before salvation.

Our old lives before we came to Christ continue to call out to us. The old patterns of sin – selfishness, pride, destructive habits, profane speech, sinful desires, all these are to be left behind. They are not to characterize our life as followers of Jesus.

By the power of the living God inside us, we are to not allow ourselves to be conformed to these desires any longer, but rather we are to follow Jesus in obedience to His commands and way of living.

And included in these commands and His example of living is found in verse 15 (READ)...

Under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter says that it is holiness that should characterize our lives – not just part of our lives, but every aspect of our lives –

Our thoughts, our words, our actions, our desires, our attitudes, our marriage, our job, our relationships, our priorities, our habits, our finances, our home-life, school-life, thought-life – every part of us.

Because the God who called us – by the ways, we don't "find" God, God "finds us", He called us to be saved, salvation is a work of God in us that is the result of His Spirit drawing us to Himself to be saved.

If you're saved this morning, it's because God drew you for salvation, He convicted you of your sin, He revealed to you your need for Him in your life, it's only because of Him that you are saved today....

God who did all this spiritual work in your life because of His great love for you, this same God is holy, and He requires that we be holy like him. Anything less is to live beneath the calling of God on your life.

Anything less than a life of holiness is beneath the standard Christ set by His life of holiness. Anything less than a full devotion to holy living is a mockery to the God who called you and who saved you for this purpose.

Fellowship the spiritual emphasis we're beginning today is a call for all of us to embrace God's call on our lives, to be holy because He is holy, and not for a season – not for a few days or weeks or months – but as a lifestyle, a way of life, for it is the way of life God has called us to live up to.

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GOALS OF THIS EMPHASIS

- 1. To assist everyone in our church family to be certain of their salvation**
- 2. To teach everyone how to deal with the roadblock to holiness – sin – on a daily basis**
- 3. To teach how to experience victory over sin, self and Satan**
- 4. To provide the tools necessary to make everyone's daily walk with Christ effective in experiencing spiritual cleansing as a lifestyle toward holiness and sanctification through prayer and the Word.**
- 5. To spiritually position our church family to be a corporate body that God would use for His glory in Norwalk and beyond.**

Our emphasis sits on 3 legs and as many of these legs that you involve yourself in during this emphasis, the greater the impact this emphasis will have on your life.

(Slide) 1. Corporate Engagement on Sunday mornings

Messages:

- Sunday, April 11th: “What Kind of People Should We Be?”
- Sunday, April 25th: “The Highway of Holiness” (from Isaiah)
- Sunday, May 2nd: “Taming the Tongue”
- Sunday, May 9th: “Relationships – Ugh!”
- Sunday, May 16th: “Crossing the Line”
- Sunday, May 23rd: “Looking the Other Way”
- Sunday, June 6th: “I Can Do This” (self-reliance)
- Sunday, June 13th: “Experiencing God’s Holiness”

Church-wide Sacred Assembly – 6:00 p.m.

We’ll cap off this emphasis with a congregational Sacred Assembly on Sunday night, June 13th. If you’ve never been a part of a Sacred Assembly, you’re in for a real treat. We’ll tell you more about it as we get closer.

My prayer is that everyone in our church, as much as it depends on you to do this, that you’ll be here every Sunday. If you’re still at home watching and you can’t return yet, then join us online every Sunday.

If you're at home and you CAN be here, I want to encourage you to turn off the TV or the computer and be here in person as we continue through this emphasis.

Live stream is a gift from God, and I thank Him for it, but it's not God's first intention for His people. He wants us to be together. Don't let something good like live-stream services, keep you from what is better – worshiping, serving and fellowship with God together with His people.

(Slide) 2. Corporate Engagement in Growth Groups

Email Pastor Brett at bkuntz@fellowshipnorwalk.org or call 981-0699.

Each week we're including a Growth Group study guide that will take you even further and deeper than I have time to go here on Sunday morning.

And the best way to use this guide is in fellowship with a small group of believers that you can discuss it with and encourage each other in. This is where our adult Growth Groups come in.

Those of you in a group, we've asked your leaders to extend your group through the beginning of June so you can walk through this emphasis with your group.

If you're not currently in a group, stop at the Welcome Center in the lobby following the service and Pastor Brett will get your contact information and we'll assist you in finding a group. Do it this morning if possible since we're beginning this emphasis today.

If you're watching online send an email to Pastor Brett or to the church officed today and we'll assist you as well.

(Slide) 3. Personal Engagement thru...

WEEKLY STUDY: Book - Returning to Holiness

- On the offering boxes on our way out. They're free. If you want to leave a donation for the book you can just slip it into the box provided.
- Weekly Study Schedule – this week: The Introduction thru page 23. This isn't a book you read through, it's a tool you use in your daily quite time with God.

If you already have a plan that you use for your daily time with God, don't set that aside, but leave some time to integrate this into your time with God.

If you're watching from home this morning, I hope you'll stop by the church office and pick up a book. If we can get one to you, please let us know and we will.

- Recommendation: Use a Spiritual Journal (IN CAFÉ)
- Another Recommendation: A-Team Partner (In the journal/brochure)

PRAYER: A Prayer Request for each day of the week (in the book)

FASTING: Choose a personal weekly fasting plan
Info. In Growth Group Study Guide

SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION: Card in the book

Let's say out loud this week's memory verse...

(Slide)

"Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness."

2 Peter 3:11

These are the three legs that this emphasis is built on and I believe as we all engage in all three of these that God is going to do a work in each of our hearts that will guide us toward being a holy people, a holy church that He uses to reach our area for Christ. Let's determine to BE that holy church with God's help.

I mentioned at the beginning this morning about the end of Peter's life and his last written words as a follower of Christ. Let's take a peek at how it all got started...

Youtube Clip: "The Miracle of the Fish (scene from The Chosen)" (5:18)

STOP at 4:06

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWGCKovAUWM>