‘Therefore…’
1 Peter 1:13-16

We’re looking at the apostle Peter’s first letter - a letter he wrote around 63AD to Christians in what’s now modern day Turkey. And up until now in the letter, he’s not told them to do anything. He’s given them no instructions, no commands, no ‘thou shalt do this’. Instead, it’s all been about what God has done for them. And he’s done a lot! Everyone else may be rejecting them, but God’s chosen them, loved them, and set them apart. He’s given them new life, new hope and an eternal inheritance in Christ. And, as a result, despite the increasing hostility they’re facing for being Christians, joy fills their hearts. And it’s all because they’ve been caught up and carried along, Peter says in v10-12, in the great river of God’s plans and purposes in Christ. Plans and purposes he first revealed through the prophets, and then proclaimed through the gospel, that Jesus himself would suffer and then be glorified.

And what’s true for them is true for you.

You see, fundamentally, Christianity is not a list of things you’ve got to do. Religion is, moralism is, because they say that to find your way to God, or to experience true enlightenment, or just to be the kind of person you should be, you need to do this and this and not do that and that.

But Christianity’s different. It’s not what you do for God, it’s what he’s done for you. And Peter’s begun this letter by saying, and look what he’s done!

But did you notice the first word of today’s passage? Verse 13, ‘Therefore…’ Understanding all that God has done for you in Christ *is* going to change the way you live.

Why You Live the Way You Do
Have you ever taken a step back and reflected on why life is the way it is for you at the moment? Why you’re living the way you are. Let’s say you’re a student, why are you spending time studying and revising? Or if you’re not a student, why did you take your current job, or find yourself working the hours you do? Why did you pull that all-nighter, or why have you decided never to do that? Why does life feel out of balance, or why have you taken steps to get it into balance? If you’re married, why do you find yourself arguing a lot, or refusing to argue and live at peace? If you’re a parent, why do you parent your kids the way you do? If you’re single, why are you taking steps to find a partner, or not?

And I ask you that, because there’s always a *therefore* to your life. You live the way you do, *because*. You’ve taken certain decisions, you spend your time in certain ways, you do some things and don’t do other things, because of this or that. There’s always a *therefore*.

And that *therefore* - why you live the way you do, your present, is almost invariably based on your past, or the future you either want or don’t want. You failed the exam last time, *therefore* this time you’re studying hard. Or passing will open doors for you in the future, and you’ve got dreams, *therefore* you are in the Rolex Learning Centre by 6 every morning. Or someone hurt you in the past, and you don’t want that repeated, *therefore* you’re arguing now. Or you saw the way your dad treated your mum and you don’t want your future to look like that, *therefore* you’re choosing not to argue. Or you look back over the last year and realise things were out of whack and if you carry on that way the future doesn’t look great, *therefore* you’re taking steps to put things right.

There's always a *therefore* that explains why we live the way we do, and it's nearly always either because of the past we've experienced, good or bad, or the future we hope, or hope not, to experience.

So look again at v13, 'Therefore…' And Peter's saying, I want to re-orient you. Rather than what you've done or had done to you in the past, or the future you hope to create, being the ultimate things that shape the way you live now, I want you to see it's what Christ's done for you, and will do for you, that can shape your present. You're chosen, loved, and set apart by God. Christ has risen from the dead. God has prepared an inheritance for you and Christ death and resurrection was foretold by the prophets and God has caught you up and carried you along in his great stream of redemption… let that change the way you live now.

But how?

Firstly, in where you put your hope. Verse 13 again, 'Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, *set your hope fully* on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

Now, when we use the word *hope*, it's often not much more than wishful thinking. In fact, when we say we're hoping something happens there's almost an expectation it won't. Like, I really hope it snows, but the forecast doesn't look great. Or, I really hope he doesn't go and do that, but given what he did last time, he probably will. There's often a but after our hope.

Christian hope is different. There's no but. When the Bible talks of hope it's talking of a settled, certain, this is going to happen, expectation.

And Peter's saying, God has done all of this for you in Christ, *therefore*, set your 'this-is-going-to-happen' hope *now* on… what? What do we normally pin our hopes on? What do we tend to look to tell us the future's going to be ok? It could be your qualifications, passing this exam, or exams you've already passed; it could be key relationships: that person I know will do the necessary. It could be wealth - there's enough in the bank to get us through. It could be yourself: I'll be able to work something out.

Instead, Peter's saying, set your hope on Christ and all he's going to do for you in the future - the grace that will come when he returns and makes everything new. Live now in the light of *that* future. Let that be what shapes your response to hard times now. Let that be what shapes how you treat your wife, or kids, or team members. Let that be what decides whether you speak up or stay silent on some issue. When Jesus returns he will right every wrong and heal every harm. Let that shape your now.

But did you notice he said, 'set your hope *fully'* on that. Because you could just do it partially. I don't know if you've ever been punting, but in Cambridge the river Cam is shallow and there are these flat bottomed boats, punts, that you propel along the river with a pole. And every year the tourists arrive and give it a go. And sometimes you'll watch them trying to get into a punt, and the fatal error is to place one foot in the punt while leaving the other too long on the bank, as the punt slowly moves away. Peter's saying, don't do that with your hope. Don't have a foot in both camps, in the punt and on the bank. Don't set some of your hope on what Jesus has in store for you and

some of it in your bank account, or others' good opinion of you, or your publication record, or your chosen politician. In view of what God has done for you and will do for you, set your hope fully, on what's to come in Christ.

But how do you do that?

The Way You Think Matters

And Peter says that to set your ultimate hope on the grace to come at Christ's return is going to take effort, mental effort. You can do it, he says, by, v13, 'preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded.'

Now, when he says, 'preparing your minds for action', he literally says, 'by girding up the loins of your mind'. And in the ancient world, if a man wanted to run, he had to hoist his robe up between his legs, tuck it into his belt and then run. Today, given it's way too cold to go running, we might say 'wax your skis and sharpen your edges.' Or 'roll up your sleeves, there's work to be done.'

And you're to do that to your mind Peter says. You see, for Christ's return, and the new creation he's going to bring about when he returns, to be the thing that shapes your life now, you're going to have to be intentional about thinking that way. Maybe you've let nostalgia for the golden days, or hurts of the past be what shapes your now. Maybe you're a pessimist by nature, or look to the future with anxiety, well, Peter says, you need to roll up the sleeves of your thinking.

But then he puts it another way, to set your hope fully on the grace to come in Christ, you need to be 'sober-minded'. And the opposite of that is to be intoxicated. Because when you're intoxicated you either think things are way better than they are, and you're some kind of super-hero. Or you think things are way worse than they are and everyone's trying to pick your pocket. You either see fairies or monsters. Or your vision is too blurred to distinguish the two.

But to be *sober-minded* is to see your now as it really is and the future Christ is bringing as it really is. And living in the now, you're not intoxicated by the culture or anaesthetised by comfort and consumerism. You're not taken in by the dreams of the left or the nightmares of the right. Instead you think straight. You roll up your sleeves and train yourself to see all of now in the light of all that God has been doing and is doing and will do in Christ. And when you find yourself putting your ultimate hope in something other than Christ you take your thinking in hand and you speak to yourself and remind yourself of a far better hope.

And as you do there are going to be some things you don't do.

Don't be Conformed

Now Erasmus, the Dutch humanist and philosopher wrote that 'Human beings are not born but formed.' Now, if that's taken to mean that a human embryo or infant is less than human it's wrong, but if taken to mean what Erasmus meant, that a human life is one that can be *shaped* it's absolutely right. You're not born the way you are. Your past, and the way you see yourself now, and what you put your hope in for the future, all shape you. But so too do your desires, the desires you seek to satisfy.

Look at Peter's second command. Verse 14, 'As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance.' So, Peter says, you're God's child. You have a heavenly Father

who has chosen you and loved you and set you apart. That's your identity. And because he's so good to you, you obey him.

And that means *not* letting your past - the past when you didn't know him as your father, the past when you were ignorant of his love for you, the past when you had no idea of the security of knowing he's chosen you, don't let that past define your present.

Think how that works here in Switzerland. You came here from your home country and you could not believe that the shops didn't open on Sundays. You want to go shopping, you need to go shopping, but you can't go shopping because all the shops are shut. What kind of a country is this? But after a few weeks you begin to realise, hey maybe this isn't so bad after all. Maybe not being able to shop is actually a good thing. Maybe I was just ignorant of what Switzerland has right. Now, you could continue trying to live in your old identity - the you who could always shop, but if you do, you'll spend your Sundays seething with frustration. Or you could live into your new identity, and rest in being in Switzerland.

And Peter's saying, live into your new identity as a child of God, and don't be conformed to all those things you wanted when you didn't know his love for you.

Think for a moment what those 'passions of your former ignorance' might be. Before you knew you were chosen by God, how did the desire for the approval of others drive you? Before you knew you were loved by God, how did your need for love drive you to seek it in all the wrong places? Before you knew your life was in his good hands, how did the desire to control everything and everyone show itself? Before you knew he accepts you in Christ, how did the need to always be right result in the need to put everyone else down. Before you knew your security in him, how did your desire for security warp the way you viewed money, sex or power.

But now, you're a chosen, loved, set apart, forgiven child of God, so don't let those passions and desires shape you. Instead, let it be God.

Do Be An Imitator

Now, children tend to copy their parents, don't they? I remember once our eldest daughter Naomi coming into the bathroom while I was shaving, pulling up the stool beside me and proceeding to cover her face with shaving foam and copy me shaving. You'll be glad to know it didn't last.

But what should last is our desire to copy and be shaped and formed by the character of our Father. We're not to be conformed to the desires that dominated our old identities but, v15, 'as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.'

Now, there's an expression in English that goes, 'like father, like son.' Unfortunately it holds true for daughters as well, because my girls say that they get all their good qualities from Su and all their bad ones from me. And one of the sobering things about being a parent is watching your children become like you. Except when it comes to the One who's called us and loved us, there are no bad qualities to imitate. Instead there's his holiness.

Now we can hear the word *holy* referred to a person and think of stained glass saints and nunneries and monasteries and withdrawal from the world, and people who are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use; or people who have lost the ability to laugh, or who have a certain aloofness about

them. And it's not just wrong passions they've rid themselves of, it's *any* passion. Which, of course, is what Buddhism would have you do.

Is that what Peter's got in mind? No, and his quote tells us why. Verse 15-16, 'But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

And that quote comes from the book of Leviticus. And you might hear that and it send a shiver down your spine. Because maybe you've made a new year's resolution to read through the whole Bible, you start in Genesis and in a few weeks you get to Leviticus, and you encounter blood being splattered and priests pulling down houses because of mildew and skin rashes and hairs turning white, and it's like a different world, and it becomes the graveyard of your new year's resolution to read the Bible.

And yet, the truth is, you can't really understand the Christian faith without understanding Leviticus. And just like in the world of healthcare there's dirty, clean and sterile, so Leviticus presents us with three ritual states: unclean, clean and holy. And God's holy. In all his beauty and moral perfection he's set apart, he's in a class of his own. And just like you can't enter an operating theatre unless you're sterile, so you cannot approach God unless, like him, you're holy.

The problem is, we aren't. We're unclean. And all the rules and regulations of Leviticus are designed to drive that point home. But it also sets out the way God's provided for his people to become clean, and approach him. And it's the way of a spotless sacrifice being offered in our place.

But Leviticus is also about God's people being different from the peoples around them. And at numerous points in Leviticus God says to the people, 'I'm holy, so you too be holy.' Turn away from the attitudes and practices of the surrounding nations, and instead become like me. Don't live like everyone else. You have a new identity as my people, so take on my character, take on my love for your neighbour, for the poor and the vulnerable. Take on the sexual ethics that protect and nurture marriage and family. Take on worship of me rather than the worship of idols which demand your children in payment.

So to be holy *is* to be different, it *is* to be set apart. But not the set-apartness of the ghetto, but the set-apartness that shines as a light in the world: there is something better, something far more beautiful, and it's God.

And Peter says, that's not just a call on ancient Israel, it's a call on the new, true Israel, from these first century Christians, Jew and Gentile, down to you and me.

The question is, why would they and why would you and I embrace that call? You see, it was precisely their differentness that was getting the people Peter's writing to into trouble. It was their refusal to make sacrifices in the pagan temples, or worship the emperor, or attend the gladiatorial games, or engage in sex outside of marriage, that was turning their friends and families and colleagues against them. And it's precisely that differentness, over attitudes to sexual ethics, or care for the vulnerable, or the refusal to worship and sacrifice children to the gods of the age, that could bring hostility and the charge of intolerance upon us.

So why be holy in all our conduct? Why be willing to pay the price of becoming more like God?

Because Jesus was willing to pay the price to become like you. Later on in this letter Peter tells us, 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (3:18). So if all the sacrifices and rituals in Leviticus were about how Israel could be brought near to the Holy God, Peter's saying they were only ever sign-posts pointing to the one final spotless sacrifice of Christ himself. And at the cross *the* righteous one was counted unrighteous that we might be made righteous. The holy one took on our unholiness that we might become holy. He became like us that we might become like him.

And when you realise the depth of Christ's sacrificial love for you, it makes you want to grow more like him. When we understand the cost of his love for us, we embrace the cost of loving him. Because he's the ultimate example of what it means to be holy - the one who perfectly imaged God, who loved his neighbour and cared for the vulnerable, and shone like a light in the world. And he didn't do it by withdrawing from the world, but entering it and bearing the griefs and pains and hostility of the world.

And we've been brought near, because he was cut off. That's how much he loves us. So, set your hope on him Peter says. You've only just begun to taste all that he has for you. And don't be conformed to how everyone else lives or how you used to live. Instead, let his character and his passions shape you. Be holy as he is holy.