Introduction: I am still thinking about the sermon last week—that happens to me sometimes. I have been thinking that it is always great to speak on joy and hope—that these are great qualities in themselves. Even better and even more lasting is the joy and the hope we can have in Jesus Christ alone. If we are lacking in the hope and joy departments, we must refocus our hearts and minds on Jesus. If we are rooted, if we define ourselves in relationship to Him, we will find great joy and lasting hope. We cannot find such joy or hope in ourselves or in others. Only in Christ.

The question I have for you this morning is: Do you want to be like Jesus? If so, Peter tells us to be prepared to be holy, to be like Jesus.

Be Prepared

I call this passage one of the Boy Scouts verses of the Bible. For those of you who are familiar with the Scouts, what is their motto? The word here for being prepared is that of girding up the loins of your mind. In the Middle East, men wore long robes that made swift movements challenging. When getting ready to be active, they would tie a broad belt around their waist to give them greater freedom of movement. It would be like saying today, roll up your sleeves or take off your jacket. Peter tells us to prepare our minds, to realize that holiness in our minds will require effort, time and initiative. Holy living begins with our minds, for as the phrase goes: garbage in, garbage out. We are to have a disciplined mind, one that is taken captive for Christ. Paul echoes this, telling us in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Our mind is a battlefield. It does matter what we think. Be prepared. Get ready to foster the work of the Holy Spirit in us, renewing us to be more like Christ.

Peter tells us to be prepared to be self-controlled, which actually means to be sober. The word sober in Greek has two meanings, both of which are in play here. The word means to not become intoxicated either by drink or by life, by anything other than Jesus. We are to have a sober judgment, one that is not swept away by fads or the next new thing. Actually, I don't like the word self-control. As believers, we want to be God-controlled. Peter also tells us to be prepared by setting our hope fully on God’s grace. Peter is saying we must be prepared for what God will do in our lives by being hopeful. We are to live in hope, to be people who choose not to be pessimistic, fatalistic or judgmental. We are to be optimistic people, whose hope and trust is in Him regardless of the evil or negativity or even challenges all around us.
Life before Christ

Peter makes it clear that we should be prepared for our lives to be made new in Christ. We should begin to learn to model His character and His holiness. What are the elements of our old life? Peter says we once lived a life of ignorance. The pagan world of ancient times was haunted by its inability to know God. Aristotle, for example, said, “God is the supreme cause dreamed by all and known by none.” The ancient world did not doubt the existence of God, but believed if gods or God existed, they were unknowable and completely uninterested in humans or in the universe. The old life is also one dominated by desires of the flesh. Chastity and monogamy was rare. Jerome, the Biblical scholar, knew of one woman who was married to her 23rd husband and who was the 21st wife for that man. The cultural aim then was to find newer and wilder ways to gratify the flesh. The third characteristic of the old life is futility. Without Christ, we have no purpose, no hope, and no fullness of life. The Roman poet Catullus wrote to his wife, saying, “Suns can rise and set again; but once our brief light is dead, there is nothing left but one long night from which we shall never awake.” Life without Christ is empty and hopeless. Is your life empty or full of His presence?

Being Holy

Now that Christ has found us, we can live new lives, marked by holiness. Peter tells us, “But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do: for it is written, 'be Holy, because I am holy.” The Hebrew word here for holiness is gadosh, which means to be set apart, sacred, hallowed, or pure. The Greek word here is hagios, which means to be different. We must prepare and we must dare to be different because of Jesus Christ. Only God is holy, but if we really learn from Him and spend time with Him, we will begin to take on His character. If we are truly filled with the Holy Spirit, we will become holy, like Jesus. This command is an ancient one and is at the heart of Judaism. Being chosen by God, being in a relationship with God involves a great call and a great responsibility. Our lives are no longer our own. Holiness and obedience go hand in hand. We must obey God if we are to be holy. We cannot engage in a postmodern self selection of what we think it means to be righteous, holy or Godly. Only in and through God's word can we see His will and plan for us. D.L. Moody says holiness is best seen in our lives, saying, “It's a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. Lighthouses don't ring bells and fire cannons to call attention to their shining-they just shine.” We must get ready and be prepared to become holy, because the world around us will try to distract us from Jesus.

In addition to holiness, we are called to reverence, to live our lives in reverent fear. This is an attitude of the mind that allows us to always be aware of God's presence. The word here for fear is phobos, which is actually a healthy kind of fear. This fear is that of being in awe,
of seeing God as being awesome and of living in recognition of His person, holiness, power and love. How seriously do we take God? God takes our sin very seriously and we see this on the cross. Life is short and God sees all, so don't waste time on sin! We are to live as redeemed people. This word had a special meaning to those in the Roman Empire. Redemption was a costly gift, a freeing of a person from a penalty or bondage. Peter says that Jesus has bought us our freedom, that His death is more valuable to us than anything or anyone else. We now belong to Jesus, not to ourselves. As a result, we must love as Christ loves us. Peter says we are to love sincerely or deeply from the heart. Love must be sincere, or anupokritos, without hypocrisy. Love must also be fervent, deeply intense and involve all of who we are. This deep love is agape love, love that is self giving, self offering and selfless. Love is the center of the Christian lifestyle, of being holy, of being different. We must be intent on and prepared to be loving, modeling and mirroring Christ’s heart as we do so.

Being a disciple of Jesus is not easy but is very worthwhile as we enjoy being loved and loving others, as we learn to become who God has created us to be. Be prepared: to be blessed, to be like Jesus! Be prepared to be different, dare to be different because Christ is in you!