

# The Power of a Holy Life

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**Bible Text:** 2 Kings 4:8-9

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I'll never forget my next door neighbor when I was a teenager. He was a godly Christian man and he gave me my first Bible. He prayed for me. He was concerned over my lost condition. He invited me to church and he was my dear friend. This man always had a smile on his face and kind words of encouragement. When I think of him now, although over forty years have passed, the fragrance of his holy life lives on in my memory today. I'll never forget the power of his holy life which so influenced mine.

There is something special about a person who walks near to God in a life of holiness. The Bible speaks of a holy man of God in 2 Kings 4:8-9. This passage is about the prophet Elisha. Listen to how he is described, "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually."

The Shunemite woman observed that the prophet Elisha, even in his daily activities, was a holy man of God and there was something different about him. He stood out from other men. She comments to her husband in so many words, "Look here, I see that this person is a holy man of God." There was something about the prophet Elisha that made him stand out.

If you recall, at the beginning of his public ministry he walked with his mentor, Elijah. And Elijah said to him, "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee." And Elisha said, "I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." And all one has to do is read about the ministry of Elisha to see the miracles that God performed through this consecrated vessel of a man. Listen to this list of miracles that God did through this vessel of his. He parts the Jordan River, he makes the Jericho spring drinkable, he sends bears to punish irreverent youths, pay attention young people. He floods ditches to confuse the Moabites, he multiplies the widow's oil, the Shunemite woman bares a son, he resurrects the Shunemite woman's son from the dead, he purifies poison stew, he heals Naaman's leprosy, Gehazi is struck with leprosy, he floats a lost axe head, he gives special sight to the king's messenger and he blinds the Syrian army. Did he not indeed receive a double portion of Elijah's mantle?

What impresses me more than all of these as to the mighty deeds of this man Elisha is this, listen to this passage from 2 Kings 13:20-21, “And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.” That is an astonishing fact that Elisha’s corpse had power to resurrect a life. You see friends, the power of a holy life lives on. If you live a holy life unto the Lord, the influence of that life will live long after you’ve gone. The power of a holy life will live on.

My message today is entitled “The Power of a Holy Life,” and I’ve been fortunate enough to know men of God who knew the power of living a holy life. Two men come to my mind as I speak to you now. Both of these men are in glory but their lives stood out for their lives of holiness. One was my mentor, Dr. Stephen Olford. Stephen Olford was known for the power of his holy life. Let me share this story with you about him. Dr. Olford was scheduled to preach at a church in Texas and a young seminary student who was to pick him up at the airport asked the pastor of the church to show him a picture of Dr. Olford so he would know how to recognize him. The pastor told this young man, “No need for that. Just go to the airport terminal and watch the people as they exit and look for a man who has God all over him.” And sure enough, when the young man saw Dr. Olford emerge from the crowd, he recognized him instantly as a man of God. That’s the power of a holy life.

Let me tell you about another man who had the power of a holy life and that man was Dr. Adrian Rogers. I’ll never forget it, I had just dropped my wife and daughter off at a local restaurant in Memphis and it was raining and dark outside. I parked the car and got underneath my umbrella. It was raining so hard I could barely see in front of me. As I made my way to the door of the restaurant and finally opened it, there was a man standing in the light of the room and his arms were extended to greet me. And he hugged me and said, “Ernesto!” It was Adrian Rogers, he called me Ernesto. But the sensation I felt was as if I’d died and entered heaven and Jesus was greeting me and hugging me and calling my name. You see, Adrian Rogers made me think of Jesus because of the power of his holy life. Do you know people like that? That when you are around them they make you thirsty for Jesus? They model Jesus’ will.

There are four aspects from this theme on the power of a holy life which I would like to look at in scripture. First I will list them. We are called to be holy. We are commanded to be holy. We are changed so as to be holy. And we are consecrated by God to be holy vessels, to bring him honor.

Let’s look at the first one, We are called to be holy. This is how God describes a believer as found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 1:4, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” What a magnificent thought that before the world was even spoken into existence, that in the heart of God he chose us, elected us that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. What a staggering thought that in spite of the fact that

we were enemies of God, alienated from him because of sin, even in spite of ourselves he chose us according to the good pleasure of his will. He chose us to be holy. We have here a synopsis of the entire gospel. The purpose of God and Christ was to undo and to rectify completely the effects of sin and the fall of man. This is plainly seen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle of John, "For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." See, holiness is an attribute of God. So to be holy is to be godly. To be a follower of Christ is to be Christ-like. Is that not what our Bible tells us? You cannot live in sin and still be a follower of Christ, it's impossible.

Amos 3:3 tells us, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" God is light, in him there is no darkness. God told Abraham, "Walk before me and be thou perfect." Our purpose in salvation is that we are to walk with God and enjoy his fellowship. So we are called to be holy.

The second aspect of this holy life is that we are commanded to be holy. Since holiness is an attribute of God, God himself has declared, "Be ye holy for I am holy." We are commanded to be holy as followers of God. A life of holiness for a believer is not optional. You see, we baffle terribly in our pulpits about trying to divide the Christian life into separate experiences of salvation and then the deeper committal to Christ and the deeper life which is optional. There's no biblical basis for that. Jesus said to his disciples, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." You cannot call yourself a follower of Christ if you don't follow him.

The Apostle Peter knew the demands of discipleship. He counted the cost of following a crucified Savior. He gave up everything to follow Christ. As a Hebrew, Peter was kicked out of his church, so to speak, for following Christ. He was alienated from his family members for following Christ. He was persecuted and imprisoned for his testimony for Christ. And Peter eventually was martyred for his faith in Christ.

You see, the early church knew the cost of following Christ and the demands of Christ upon their lives. They knew full well the utter severity of God's holy law and that man must be judged by that law. No man will pass that test because we are sinners and we desperately need a substitute for sin. Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

Peter knew the commands of Christ so he writes in his epistle, 1 Peter 1:14-17, "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." So we are commanded to be holy.

Next, as followers of Christ we are changed so we can be holy. You cannot live the Christian life and have victory if you're truly not born-again. You must be washed in the blood and born of the Spirit to live the Christian life. How can one live a supernatural life, a life only given from above, if you are not saved. How can you be joined the vine as

a branch and abide in him in a living union with a risen Lord if you are truly not regenerated? You cannot. Therefore, you must be born-again. You see, a Christian is someone who has experienced change. When Jesus was here in his earthly ministry and he entered a village, those individuals who encountered him were changed.

Allow me to illustrate this by the story of John Wesley's conversion. John Wesley was known for his life of holiness. In 1735, John Wesley sailed to America as a missionary to the colony of Georgia. He came to convert the Indians. He was an ordained minister in the Church of England. But he had nothing but trouble here in America. He fell in love with a young woman and she fell out of love with him and he forbade her from taking communion. And her father, who was the sheriff, ran him out of town. You see, John Wesley was not saved when he was a missionary to America. He was unsaved. He was an ordained minister in the Church of England and a missionary. And he tried his best to live as a Christian but he couldn't do it because he was unsaved.

Looking back on his time in America, he wrote in his journal, "I went to America to convert the Indians but, O, who shall convert me?" Three years later, he came savingly to Christ in a meeting in London. Let me read you the words from his diary dated May 14, 1738. "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Ottersgate Street where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt, I did trust in Christ. Christ alone for my salvation. And an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine. And saved me from the law of sin and death." Did you notice that Wesley spoke of the change which God works in the heart? That is regeneration where God takes a heart of stone and makes it a heart of flesh. Whereby he gives us new life from above. We are a new creation and old things are passed away.

You see friends, a Christian is someone who has experienced change. Allow me to contrast John Wesley with Pharaoh in the time of Moses. Moses appeared before Pharaoh and asked him to let the people of Israel go and to release them from their bondage. But Pharaoh refused. God then began a series of remedial judgments. Do you recall them? The river became blood, the land became infested with frogs and so on. Pharaoh relented because of these judgments but only briefly. He reformed, so to speak, for a time but then continued to cause Israel harm because Pharaoh was never altered. He was never changed. He died in his sins.

After each plague that God sent to Egypt, for a brief time Pharaoh reformed himself but he never was changed. Reformation is something we do to ourselves, regeneration on the other hand is something God does in us. And regeneration means change. You are not born-again without being regenerated. To be born-again you must be a changed individual. You cannot live a life of holiness on your own steam. If you do, you will be doomed to failure because the human heart is deceitful and wicked because of sin. Salvation is a change which God works in the heart through faith. And then, and only then, can you live a life pleasing to God in holiness before him.

O friends, please don't miss this, for to be off on this is a matter of eternity and where you will spend eternity. Either in heaven or in hell. We are redeemed with the blood of Christ and by his death. We need a sin substitute. He has paid the price for our redemption with his blood.

Allow me to explain this word "redemption" as given by three words in the Greek language. See, the Bible tells us that Jesus came to save his people from their sins.

There is an incident in the life of John Sung, the famous Chinese evangelist. One day after Dr. Sung preached, another minister upbraided him. He said, "Dr. Sung, in your sermon today you told the audience that you sin every day. You erred in that remark, my brother. Don't ever say that again. Geniuses never preach the sinning religion." After that, John Sung, never made that comment again. You see, a holy God expects his followers to be holy. I'm not speaking of being a Pharisee but inward holiness towards God.

Let me give you these Greek words that explain redemption in clearer terms. I once visited the ancient city of Ephesus and I took a tour to the excavated ruins. And there among the ruins was what was called an agora. An agora was an outdoor marketplace, kind of like a mall that we would know today. It was a marketplace where items were bought and sold, slaves were also sold in the agora. Now take that word spelled "agora" and make the word agorazo. You see in the Greek the word agorazo means redemption and in the Greek the word agorazo means that Jesus went into the marketplace of sin and bought us by his blood and with his death. That is redemption.

Now, add the little preposition ex in front of that word agorazo and you have exagorazo. Ex means to take out of something, to remove something out of. So this word for redemption, exagorazo, means that Jesus not only entered the marketplace of sin and purchased us by his blood and with his death but he removed us from the marketplace of sin. He set us free from its dominion.

You see a saved person has experienced a double cure. That person is saved from the penalty of sin and is saved from the power of sin. To be saved means we're brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and life. We are given a new heart and are changed so that we are no longer the servants of Satan but the bond slaves of Jesus Christ. Amen?

The power of a holy life should be seen in every follower of Christ. It should be seen in our testimony, our walk, our witness, our daily contact with others. As the Shunemite said of Elisha as he passed by in his daily walk, she perceived he was a holy man of God.

Now here is the test, can your spouse say of you that you are a holy man of God? Can your spouse say of you that you are a holy woman of God? Can your children say of you that you are parents which emulate a holy walk before God? This generation of lost teenage church members need to see the reality of Christ in the lives of their parents. This

would draw the teenagers to God to see their parents really living lives of surrender to Christ in their daily walk with him.

Let me proceed to our last point in the power of a holy life and that is, We are consecrated by God to be holy vessels to bring him glory. As Christians, we are consecrated for his holy use and service. Your life is not to be lived selfishly. That is the world's way. You are bought with a price. Your time is not your own, your body is not your own, your money is not your own. Christ must be a complete Master. Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." Have you done it? God saved you so that he can use you.

Let me repeat that, God saved you so he can use you. He did not save you so you would be happy. He saved you so that you would be holy. The Bible gives us a clear warning from scripture and if you ignore this, it is hell for you. The Bible says in the book of Hebrews, "Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

You see friends, the truest evidence of a saved life is a life of holiness. In fact, when God saves a person he gives that person a disposition for holiness. You have a new desire to live for Christ, you now hate your old sins. And because of the great mercy of forgiveness of sins, you now serve God with a new heart, striving after holiness and obedience toward him. Why? Because when you were lost, you were ruled with a self-love. Sin is when love itself rules on the throne of your heart and everything else is subservient to your love of yourself. When you are saved, self is dethroned and Jesus is enthroned as Lord of our lives. Everything now is subservient to him. You hate sin, you avoid evil, you live for eternity and winning souls. Bringing others to Christ is a passion for you now because that's what Christians do. They're constantly witnessing for Jesus.

That Shunemite woman said of Elisha, "I perceive that this is a holy man of God." Pastor, let me ask you a question, "Can your congregation say that about you?" You see, a congregation will often reflect their pastor. If you are a man of prayer, chances are they too will be a praying people. If you are constantly going on and witnessing for Christ, they too will become soul winners by your good example. If you are a holy man of God, they too will thirst after holiness.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne was a Scottish pastor who was known for his holy walk with God. His favorite saying was, "Lord, make me holy as a saved sinner can be." M'Cheyne had this to say to his congregation, he warned them with the following words. Listen carefully to what he said, "Dear friends, you may have awakenings and lightnings, experiences, a full heart and prayers and many signs. But if you lack holiness you will never see the Lord. A real desire after real holiness is the truest mark of having been born-again." M'Cheyne knew what it was like to have a close walk with God. He once told his friend, Andrew Bonar, that Jesus was nearer and more real to him than his closest family member.

One day an American preacher went to visit Robert Murray M'Cheyne's church in Scotland and the sextant of the church took him around and showed him M'Cheyne's chair and the pulpit he preached from. The sextant told the visitor, "Here, sit in his chair. Now, put your face in your hands. Now weep. That's how holy M'Cheyne did it." He then took the visitor to the pulpit and told him to stand in it. Again, he said, "Now, put her face in your hands. Now, weep. That's how holy M'Cheyne did it."

Robert Murray M'Cheyne's memoirs have influenced thousands. In fact, to read his memoirs is to be like the corpse thrown into the grave of Elisha. For to read them gives life. The power of his holy life lives on.

I will close with the words of another holy man of God, J. Sidlow Baxter. Sidlow Baxter maintained a close walk with God and he often gave this advice to any who desired to go deeper with God in a life of holiness. Here are Dr. Baxter's words, "What I give to him he takes. What he takes he cleanses. What he cleanses he fills. And what he fills he uses."

O friends, don't ever underestimate the power of a holy life. You see, a life lived properly for God will leave a lingering fragrance behind it.