

Calvary Christian Center

Sermon

November 30, 2014

“The War Against Our Soul-Charting our Course”

Turn your Bibles to 1 Peter Chapter 2 and we are looking at verses 11 and 12 today as we are working our way through this wonderful letter of first Peter.

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable so when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

This is God's Word. Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, we are being exposed right now to the truth. Lord Jesus, you spoke and said your word is truth. If we choose to accept it today, our minds will get a little more renewed. Holy Spirit, we are asking that you will make that a reality for each one of us today as we pray this through Christ. Amen.

For the past 10 years, I have been engaged in a war. A different kind of a war. A war with Bermuda grass. You see a picture on the overhead of bermuda grass. You see this ugly stuff?. Cathryn and I have been engaged in a war for 10 years with this stuff and if you were to drive by our home we are not succeeding very well. The patches are getting bigger. It started in a small area and got bigger and bigger. And different people have said you could kill it with this or treat it with this. I have been all over researching trying to find out what to do about it. It has been a WAR. Ongoing year after year.

Our text this morning warns believers that they live in a world where war is being engaged against them. In this text, God is bringing to our attention two urgent issues that we face as Christians. There are two important issues that every Christian in every generation will face and the first was is how the soul of man might not be destroyed and secondly how the glory of God might not be belittled.

Did you notice in verse 11, it said “which wage war against your soul”. In other words, one of the most important issues for you and I and Christians is that soul of man might not be destroyed and secondly in verse 12, seeing your good deeds and glorifying God. That is how the glory of God might not be belittled.

These are two huge issues. We are gonna talk in a moment about what we need to do about that. First, I want to take a moment, to discuss how important this really is and what is at stake here. Notice in Verse 11 we are being called sojourners and exiles. Peter is writing to Christians and every Christian in every generation living in this world is a sojourner and an exile. He has brought this up already in this letter. It is very important to Peter that we understand this. Just what our life will be like in this broken world. We are sojourners and exiles primarily because our relationship with God in Christ makes us now strangers in this world and because we live in reverence us God rather than the conformity of the

world. And because we have different priorities and different values than our neighbors, we are considered strange. If you attend high school and you begin to adopt Christian values. You begin to say there are certain things I will not do because you have a reverent fear of God, people will consider you to be somewhat strange. When you go to work and there are things that you will not do, certain lines you will not cross because of my reverent fear for God and my unwillingness to conform to this world, you will be considered strange.

We have jobs, we have relationships, we are in society. Yet this is not our home country. We reside here but we have not become assimilated here. We live here in a world that shows by its priorities, its values and its preoccupations that it does not regard these two issues to be urgent. When you got up this morning, if you read the paper, no one warns you about the dangers. No one warns you that God was not being glorified as he should. You say, "Of course not brother Van." We are so used to living in this world that does not warn us about these urgent issues. There is not public service announcement on the radio warning us of the peril of our soul. There is no government agency that tells us how to wage war for our souls. It is only as we hear God's word and hear God speak to us that we learn about these dangers, cause we live here. We are in a God-neglecting, God-ignoring world. We live in a world, where the songs that you download will not wet your appetite for the glory of God. By and large, the songs that you download these are songs that will not wet your appetite for his Glory.

Moms and Dads, the movies and tv shows of this world do not ignite passion for the most important being in the universe. Have you noticed that the favorite movies and shows that we go see, do not ignite a delight for God. It does the opposite. That is the kind of world we live in and we are strangers and exiles.

David Wells, christian writer hits the nail on the head when he said, "We live in a world, where God is simply un-important. His commands are less authoritative than our desires. His judgments are no more awe-inspiring than the evening news. His truth is less compelling than the advertisers sweet fog of flattery and lies. " I think he is exactly right.

All believers of every generation are warned of this by the phrase "sojourners and exiles". This is our battleground where a war is being waged. What are we to do about this. Well, we are told in our text what we are to do about this. Last Lords day, we looked at verse 10 and we were introduced to our new identity and purpose. Her is why you need to think about what you are reading. This is a letter, and there is a flow. Her is the flow of thought. In verses 4-10 we have a new identity and purpose and we have to think and act in accordance with that. In Verses 4-10 it says, "here's your new identity. You once were not a people, but now you are the people of God." You have a new identity. In verse 9, you are the chosen race, a people for his own possession. That is your identity and then he gives the purpose that you may proclaim the excellencies of his marvelous light. Now in light of this, you and I are to think and act in this new reality. So this is when we get to verse 11 and 12.

Her is what we see. We see 2 things, abstinence and maintenance. "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul." Look at verse 12 we see maintenance. "Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable." Another way of saying that is maintain a good way of life. Before we get to the abstinence, let me clear this up, we live in a culture

where the first thing we think of is sexual abstinence. This text includes far more than that. Notice in verse 11 abstain from what? The passions of the flesh that wage war against our souls. Lets remember something about the flesh. I will give you two definitions. This is one definition, the flesh, in the new testament sometimes flesh refers to the skin on our bodies; however, the majority of the times when you see the English word "flesh" it is the Greek word sarks which means "that element within humans that generates desires that are hostile to God and oppose his will for our lives.

You have an element in you as a fallen human being we have this part of us that is the flesh. Here is the way it works, it creates desires that are hostile to God and oppose his will for our lives. So lets say you are sitting here and you are a Christian. Most of you are. And you say, "Brother Van I have these times when I know I should be reading the Bible and studying and getting acquainted with Gods word and growing in my knowledge of Him but I neglect it so often. I find myself doing other things. I find myself playing games on my phone. Burning up the hours playing games." Your flesh is winning. Your flesh is creating desires that oppose God's will for your life. And it is a struggle. You struggle and think I want to do this but end up doing something else.

Christians need to be concerned with this. Peter is writing to Christians. He is not writing to unbelievers. Christians I urge you abstain, stay away from and say no to. There are some things we need to say no to. Brothers and sisters, abstain from these passions, lusts, desires of the flesh that wage war. You see the scriptures tell us this that before we became Christians, before we became redeemed, we lived according to the flesh. That was the control and the power that we lived under. Now that we are Christians, the scriptures say this . . . we live according to the spirit. Once we were dominated by the flesh but now there's a new leadership. There's a new dominion, the spirit of God lives within the Christian's life so that we may live according to God's actions, not to the flesh's actions. However, Christians are also told that there is now a war going on between our flesh and the indwelling spirit of God.

Notice this in Galations chapter 5. "For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh for they are opposed, they are in conflict to each other" The government doesn't warn us against this. They don't say, "Don't forget about the war against the flesh." Courier Journal won't tell you that. CNN and Fox won't tell you that. God is telling us about this great conflict that is going on in the life of every Christian. So we are told to abstain from passions and the lusts of the flesh.

Remember our flesh generates desires that are opposed to his will. In Verse 11 that is what Peter is talking about. Abstain from those passions, those lusts of the flesh that are hostile to God. What are these desires? They are misguided desires. We all have desires. Buddhism teaches that we need to get rid of all desires. That is the way you "get right" in Buddhism. That's not Christianity. Christianity doesn't say to do away with your desires. God gives us his spirit to give us new desires, godly desires. At the same time, we are given the spirit to empower us to abstain from misguided desires or otherwise known as overdesires that turn things into idols. Remember what idols are. One might think an idol is a statue, some thing that I found. We are talking about idols of the heart are those things that we desire, cherish and esteem more than God. They take the place of God in our lives. We give our time, our talents, our treasure to those things but all the while we say we believe in God but our real god is our idol.

This next definition will help us today:

“The flesh is the landing strip for the devil and the world come to provide us with a script for a life totally apart from God and his purposes.”

There's this part of us that is in us like a landing strip and occasionally the world, the devil flies in for a little visit and what they are doing is saying “Here's what's important. Here's what you really need to live for.” They'll fly in and hand us a script that tells us what is really important. Here is what you really need to commit yourself to. The world and the devils comes with its literature and its song lyrics and like a hand it reaches into our soul and flips a switch.

I've been reading a book, I finished it today, by a young woman named Helen Thorn. She is a Christian counselor at a church in England. She said this, At 17 she read her first erotic novel. I want you to listen as she describes what happened. “I began to turn the pages, a wave of language I've never seen before and scenarios that had never crossed my mind were introduced to my imagination. Every moment and every sensation experience was described in graphic detail and I was moved. I like reading most books. I loved reading this one. Why? Because it didn't just inform me or inspire me, it transported me. The power of the language was so strong that I didn't merely feel for the characters but I felt what they felt and I liked it. I liked it a lot, but that feeling didn't last.”

When I read that several things went through my mind, especially the phrase “a wave of language I had never seen before and scenarios that had never crossed my mind were introduced to my imagination.” And that is going to happen. Some of you young folks are in school and you are being called upon to read certain things. When you are called to go on to higher education there will be other things you will be called upon to read. There is certain language you will read. Authors write from a moral view. There are certain things they want to say. Claims they are wanting to plant and you need to be very careful. Mom and dad, everyone needs to be in concert with this. What happened to this young lady was she was just assaulted but it flipped something in her. It is called prurient desires. There is something about us, about our fallen-ness that when this work reaches it's hand with it's language and it's songs, it flips a switch. She said, “I loved it.” She said, “I liked the feelings but it didn't last.”

I ran into a man this week. His wife told him about 3 months ago that she no longer loved him. She had feelings for another man. He moved out. She moved the new guy in. He said to me last week, “If I just knew why. If I just knew why she did this. It doesn't make sense.” He felt that if he just knew why he would be able to deal with it better. He asked her and this is what she said. “I began to have feelings for him (the other man) and I liked the feelings and I didn't want to lose them.”

I heard that and I thought, Yes, exactly. We all like to feel good right? We all like good feelings. This feels so good, this feels so right. How could this be wrong? Here is the answer. I want you to see a passage of scripture on the overhead. Paul wrote to Christians, “We are to put off our old self which belongs to our former manner of life (in other words before you became a Christian) and is corrupt through deceitful desires.”

Helen Thorn said, "I was reading this, It was flipping all kinds of triggers in me. I was introduced to this new world. These new thoughts running through my imagination and I didn't want to lose it." But she said, "Those feelings didn't last." You know why? Because they are deceitful. They do not tell us the truth. They do not give us reality. This lady had feelings for someone other than her husband. She didn't want to lose them. But she will lose them. They are deceitful feelings, deceitful passions, deceitful lusts.

So what do we do? Here is what Peter said. He said to abstain from them. Say No, Run. Here's another way to put it, Don't treat them like a pebble. Here is what happens. I love chocolate. You eat a whole bunch of chocolate, what happens? A huge zit forms on the end of your nose. Or right there in the middle of your forehead. It just pops up. What do you do? You keep eating chocolate. Because it is just a pimple. I will treat it and I will eat more chocolate. What if it is a lump in your breast and not a pimple? What do you do? "Oh it is just a lump in my breast." No, you go see someone and tell them "I found this lump in my breast." You get serious right?

What Peter is saying here is, "I urge you." "This is urgent." This is not a pimple. This is a lump. It is time to get deadly serious about abstaining from passions and the lusts that are waging war against our soul. I can think of one young man who did. King Josiah of the Old Testament. King Josiah, God's law was read to him and he heard God's truth anew. It washed over him anew and things began to happen. He saw this collective lump of idolatry among the people he served and he expressed these strong emotions. He tore his clothes and began to weep aloud. Ultimately he began a program of destroying the idols. These lumps. And you can read about it in II Kings.

"And he brought out all the Asherah (idols) from the house of the Lord outside Jerusalem to the Brooke of Kidra and burned it at the brooke of kidra, beat it to dust and cast the dust upon the graves of the common people and he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes that were in the house of the Lord and he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah and defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings and he broke down all the high places at the gates"

You know what you are reading there? What we are seeing in action is this. Josiah responded with a seriousness that reflected an awareness that he was fighting a war against his soul. He acted in a way that showed it wasn't a pimple, it was a lump. He got serious. He goes in and begins to tear down the idols. He begins to grind them into dust. People must have been talking about him saying, "Man he's strange." Yeah, because we are strangers and exiles in this world. Exiles abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against our soul.

There is another thing we are called to. In verse 12 and that is maintenance. Will you look at verse 12 with me and look at that first phrase:

"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable."

Let me translate. In another way it means this, “Maintain a good way of living.” Maintain. It is ongoing. It is not periodic. One time. It isn’t one time, the one time I got baptized when I was 15. No, this is maintaining. Keeping up the good way of living. I want you to see this because I think this is important. The battle for our soul and for the glory of God is first at the level of desires and then at the level of behavior. That is very important that you see that. Because you see we are kind of hotwired for people to tell us, “Don’t do this, go do this, don’t do this.” The spirit of God starts with the desires first then behavior. Behavior stemming from right desires. Because if we start with behavior first and we don’t deal with what is going on inwardly then we’ll turn out to be nothing but legalists and hypocrites.

Notice Verse 11 dealt with desires and now we are getting into behaviors. The implication is this, the unbelieving world is looking at the Christian. I cannot stress this enough. You already know this, but the unbelieving world is looking at the Christian. How do I know this? Look at Verse 12. It says:

“Keep your conduct honorable among the Gentiles and when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

They are looking. Here is my question. What are they going to see? Will they see people who indulge in self-destructive behavior? Will they see people who live lives that are dominated by no restraint in indulgences? Will they see people who are living as useless way of life as opposed to a good way of life?

In Verse 11 Peter is saying, “Look, in light of the fact that the world is watching we need to live in such a way that we abstain from passions of the flesh that wage war against our soul and can lead us to indulge in self-destructive behavior.”

In other words, if we do not fight, if we do not abstain, the world will look at the church and they will say, “They are no different from the way I am.” “They are addicted to the same things I’m addicted to. They obsessively worry about the same things I worry about.” So what will they see? Will they see a people who are really strange? Really know what they are dealing with? And answer the urgent call to say, “no I’m not crossing that line, I’m not engaging in that behavior. I’m not going to go down that road.” Will they see that? Will they see a people maintaining a good way of life with good deeds.

Verse 12, They may see your good deeds. Peter is not advocating that we get on a soap box and say “looky, Looky what I’m doing. Look at what I’m doing for Jesus.” No, in Matthew Chapter 6 we are told not to pray like that, we are not to give alms like that so that it would be seen by others. What Peter is talking about is just organic. We just live and we do good deeds. There are people today in this church that are here primarily because someone who loved them reached out with good deeds. You can look at any church in this county and you will find there are many people there who were first touched by the good deeds of someone. When they look at us will they see a people maintaining a good way of life with good deeds. Will they find a people who walk in step with the spirit who generates desires of God. Will they find people who find hope and contentment in God’s mercy and power and promises. Will they see a people whose behavior points to the glory of God because their heart is set upon a sure

satisfying object of desire and hope that is not of this world.

Those who live in this world and live according to this world and the flesh, they have to look to the world for their hope and salvation. But when they look at the church they must see a people who have set their heart upon not things of this earth but God who dwells in heaven.

Finally, they need to see we are a people who live for the glory of God.

In Verse 9, it says “so that you may proclaim the excellency of him who called you out of darkness to his marvelous light.”

Two things and let me close:

This message is clearly to Christians. If you are here this morning and made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and have been baptized, this is written to you. It is not written to the world. Peter is not addressing the world here. He is speaking specifically to Christians. Here is the thing: How should we as Christian respond to verses 11 and 12? You are going to see a short prayer on the overhead that I think can be used to ignite. Let's say you are sitting here thinking, “I haven't really been waging a war, I've fallen out of step with the Lord and have not abstained from some of those deceitful desires.” Here is what as a Christian, you need to pray.:

“Lord I want to be more in love with you and be more like you and I need you to show me the areas of my life I need to change.”

That is a great way to kickstart what we have been listening to and pondering what God has been driving in and rubbing into our souls. As Christians we need to be saying, “I want to be more in love with you and more like you. I need you to show me the areas of my life I need to change.” I believe if we ask Him that sincerely, I believe he will do that. I believe he will show us and help us. I believe when we open up the scriptures and pray and we have our alone time with God, he will begin to speak to us and show us and help us.

Really what this is, is confession. It is saying to God, “I need help here, I've blown it, I haven't abstained, I've been waging a war. I'm a mess right now. I need help.” This is confession. Acknowledging before God and then repenting from the way you have been turning and turning back to God. This is for Christians.

What if you are here and you are not a Christian? All I can simply say is this, you are a POW. You are a prisoner of war. There is no struggle going on. You are a captive. The Biblical truth is that you are a captive to your own passions. You try to break free. You try to change. You find time and time again, you get further down the road of life and say “I'm a mess”. Near the end of WWII, GI's began to discover dozens and dozens of concentration camps filled with multitudes who were imprisoned and

consigned to death by the Nazi's. American, British and Canadian Soldiers who became known as the Liberators. I got an excellent book in my library called "The Liberators." How these guys would go in as forgotten captives who were consigned to death, go in and set the captive free. You thinking what I am thinking? Are you thinking about Jesus Christ who said of himself, "I have come to set the captive free." "I've come to set the heroin addict free." "I have come to set free the young man, the young woman who has found themselves addicted to that which is tearing at the very fiber of their marriage." "I have come to set free those people who are living useless lives." Jesus came to set the captive free. The most deadly captivity is the captivity of being under the power and dominion of Satan. The good news, the Gospel of what Jesus Christ has done is the power of salvation to set a person free from the dominion of Satan and free them to live life with God and in his kingdom.

We will look at this Next week about Christian freedom. We were captives but we were set free to live the glory of God but if you are not that, then it means you are still a captive. You are a POW. There is a liberator who died for you. There is a liberator who paid the price, who took the wrath of God for you, who died in your place and is risen from the dead and lives forever more. He lives to set you free and give you life abundantly. My prayer today is that you will be liberated, set free to live for the glory of God.