

“People are watching” (11)

The last time we were together Peter reminded us of some valuable truths that we must never forget. 1. He reminded us that all Christians are a part of "a chosen generation." 2. He reminded us that all Christians are a part of "a royal priesthood." 3. He reminded us that all Christians are a part of "a holy nation." 4. He reminded us that all Christians are God's "own special people." And because we are so blessed and privileged to be known in these ways we need to remember that we are the new Israel and it's God's will that through us we reconcile the world back to God.

The Reverend Harold Watson, a Congregationalist minister, received a call from a woman who was quite distressed over the death of her pet cat, Samantha. She asked the minister to conduct a funeral service for her cat. The minister explained that it was contrary to Congregationalist policy to conduct funerals for animals and referred her to a friend, a Methodist pastor. Later, Watson learned that the Methodist minister had referred her to a Presbyterian minister, who had referred her to someone else. A day later, the grieving pet owner called Watson back, still upset. She said she was at her wit's end, couldn't find a minister to conduct Samantha's funeral, and didn't know what to do. She said she planned to donate ten thousand pounds to the church of the minister who performed this service for Samantha. Watson said to her, "Well, why didn't you tell me Samantha was a Congregationalist in the first place?"

And I guess the point of that story is to remind us of how easily we can lose our Christian beliefs if we allow money to influence us. Now because we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's own special people, it should be of no surprise to us that Peter is going to urge us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of our calling.

1 Peter 2:11+12 “Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having good behaviour among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Now remember that Peter is speaking by inspiration; in other words it is actually God who is making this plea. And like most plea's we find within the Bible it's always based in and around love. That's why Peter begins this plea by reminding us that we are loved. And loved ones that is something else we should never forget.

Romans 1:7 “To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” You see as Christians we get so tied up in this world with ‘being right’ and proving everyone else ‘wrong’. We get so tied up arguing and debating over things which are simply opinion and when we're finished we forget that God loves us. We beat ourselves up every time we do something wrong or have a different viewpoint from someone else and we end up feeling unloved and not valued.

Well listen church, no matter what life throws at you; you need to remember that God loved you so much that He sent His one and only Son to die for you, even before you were a Christian. How much more does He love you now that you are a Christian? Ephesians 2:1-5 “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved.”

Someone once asked me why I always use the term ‘loved ones’ when I'm preaching, well I use it because it's true, you are loved, you're loved by your church family but especially loved by God and I don't intend to ever let you forget that.

You see loved ones, we are strangers in a strange land on a journey to our heavenly home, but we need to remind ourselves that we haven't made it home yet. And that's why Peter begs us to keep living right until we get there, because as we shall see later in this sermon, if we don't live right we might never make it to heaven. Because the minute you became a Christian is the time when you became a soldier, with Christ as your commanding officer.

And ever since that day you have been engaged in spiritual warfare. A war in which "fleshly lusts" wage war against the "soul" according to 1 Peter 2:11. And it's the outcome of this war that will determine whether or not we will reach our heavenly home. You see there will be times when we're winning this inner war and there will be times when we are losing the war miserably.

The apostle Paul understood this inner struggle when he wrote in **Romans 7:22-25** “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”

Paul says my mind wants to do one thing and please God but my flesh wants to give into sin. He says there are times he gets it right but there are also times he gets it wrong. My point is this church, if the apostle Paul recognises that there are times he will fail, **why should we beat ourselves up every time we fail, as if we should never have the same inner struggles?**

Now I'm sure you're all aware that people of the world don't read the Bible, they read our lives. And Peter was well aware of this, that's why he writes in **1 Peter 2:12** “Having good behaviour among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Peter says make no mistake about church, you are being observed by others. When you go to work, people are watching and listening. When you're at the supermarket in at that long queue, people are watching and listening. When you go for a meal in a restaurant, people are watching and listening. When you're with your friends and family, people are watching and listening. Whether your absolutely happy or totally miserable, people are watching and listening. Even when you walk out of this building today, people will be watching and listening.

And I'm sure some people will often say nice things about us and I'm also sure that some people will often speak evil of us just like they did with Jesus. But Peter is telling us if we listen to this plea and live right, it is possible to cause those very people who speak evil of us to glorify God in the ‘**day of visitation**’. Now some believe that this ‘**day of visitation**’ might refer to the ‘**Day of Judgment**’ while others believe, it's referring to the ‘**day**’ when God's grace is shown through a presentation of the gospel to them. In either case, the point that Peter is trying to get across is that we will have an opportunity to bring glory to God by the way we act towards non-believers.

You see loved ones its all about love and the way we love. You can make up a bunch of rules to keep people in line but rules and regulations will never change the heart. You need to come to every single meeting we have. You better make sure you read from the KJV only. You need to come to every single leaflet drop we have. Rules and regulations force people to change on the outside, whereas love encourages people to change in the inside. And like I said earlier, this whole plea from God is centred in and around love.

And so God pleads with us and says in **1 Peter 2:11** “Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”. The word "abstain" means "to hold one's self constantly back." And so what Peter is saying is loved ones is this, hold yourself back from fleshly lust. Fight against them all the time, don't give in to them.

If you feel the urge to get drunk, hold yourself back and get out of that situation. If you feel the urge for sexual sin, hold yourself back and get out of that situation. If you feel the urge to gossip, hold yourself back and get out of that situation.

Now you might be wondering what kind of fleshly lusts he has in mind, well Paul gives us a more definite answer to that question. **Galatians 5:19-21** “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Now notice that Paul's list covers more than just sexual sin. He also includes sins of the "**emotions**" such as hatred, outbursts of wrath, jealousies, envy, etc. And it's these very things which we must we "**hold ourselves constantly back.**" **Why?** Well according to Peter **they wage war against the soul** but also according to Paul, **they can keep us out of the kingdom of God.**

Now I don't know about you but I find this a constant struggle at times to hold myself back. But praise be to God, He doesn't leave us in the dark in how to help ourselves.

Romans 8:5+6 “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Paul asks **do you want to help yourself in this spiritual fight against your soul?** Keep your mind on the things of the Spirit, and not on the things of the flesh. **Now how do we do that?** Pray regular, read your Bible regular, meet as often as you can with other Christians, listen to Christian music in the car or at home. **Romans 13:13+14 “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”.**

Paul asks **do you want to help yourself in this spiritual fight against your soul?** Grow in Christ, and don't provide opportunities for the fulfillment of fleshly lusts, in other words watch the places you go and the company you keep. And if you find yourself in a situation which is getting too much to handle, get out of it straight away.

You remember the story in **Genesis 39** where we are told that Joseph was well built and handsome, and Potiphar's wife had her eye on him. On several occasions she tried to get Joseph to sleep with her but Joseph didn't yield to the temptation and ended up thrown in jail because of it. Well loved ones that's what we must do in situations like that or similar to that. **2 Timothy 2:22 “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”.**

And so if we want to win the "war" between the flesh and soul, and successfully complete our journey to heaven, we need to stay clear of anything and any situation which may cause us to fall. But abstaining from fleshly lusts is not the only thing expected of God's pilgrims. **1 Peter 2:12 “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation”.**

Peter begs us to **have honourable conduct**. Now what he means by that is that our conduct is to be something which is good, beautiful, harmonious, and lovely. In other words the way we act towards other people is to be something which is refreshing. And we do that by fleeing from fleshy lust and pursuing good deeds.

But what "good deeds" can we do that are beautiful to behold? **James 1:27 “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world”.** James says there are people all around us who are poor, fatherless, widowed, sick, and otherwise afflicted; he says those are the people we can help with good deeds.

Hebrews 13:1-3 “Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body”. The Hebrew writer says that we all know how to make someone feel welcomed and at home. He says we can demonstrate love and hospitality to our brethren, friends, neighbours, and even strangers.

You see loved ones our good deeds go far beyond the good deed, like we saw earlier, people are watching, people are observing, and some people will make their mind up about Christianity through your good deeds. **But what about those who speak evil against us? What about those who constantly want to mistreat us?**

An Armenian nurse had been held captive along with her brother by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier before her eyes. Somehow she escaped and later became a nurse in a military hospital. One day she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought wounded to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out "Vengeance." But a stronger voice called for her to love. She nursed the man back to health. Finally, the recuperating soldier asked her, "Why didn't you let me die?" Her answer was, "I am a follower of Him who said, 'Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.'" Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, "I never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion."

You see loved ones there are times when we just want to strike back at our enemies, but when we remember Jesus and His words, it can actually bring our enemies to Christ. Jesus says we need to react kindly to our enemies. **Luke 6:27-31 “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”**

Loved ones this is totally different from the way the rest of the world thinks and acts and sometimes that kindness knocks people off balance and gets them to stop and think. And there will be some who glorify God because of your good deeds.

When Lord Peterborough lodged for a season with Fenelon, archbishop of Cambrai, he was so delighted with his piety and virtue, that he exclaimed, at parting, "If I stay here any longer, I shall become a Christian in spite of myself."

Are we sending a message which points people to Jesus or a message which tells them to go somewhere else? A young man went for lunch in a nearby restaurant and saw the manager eating lunch from a nearby fast food establishment. Now what did the manager's choice say to the people who watched? I would think, "Don't eat here . . . the food across the street is better."

You see loved ones, like I said earlier, people are watching you. They see how you live. They hear you talk. They see your priorities in the things you buy and the way you dress. They observe the places you go. And they know the company you keep. Matthew 5:16 "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven". Jesus says you are a "walking billboard." But the question is does your advertisement say "follow me to Christ," or does it lead people across the street?

Now just before we finish some of you might be thinking that Christians are supposed to be perfect in every way. Well let me tell you I have never met such a Christian, I've met Christians who think they are perfect, but that's usually by their own standards of perfection, not Gods. Jesus was perfect in every way and our goal as Christians is to strive to be like Him. Philippians 2:5 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." And so one way to become Christ-like is to watch our behaviour and develop the mind set of Jesus Himself. And if you ever get to the point where you think you are more holy than someone else, just remember where you came from.

1 Peter 2:10 "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy". Peter says, remember just like the non-Christian is now, where they just existed, you too were once, like that. Just as the non-Christian doesn't have any mercy; you too didn't have any mercy until you received it from God.

Now the good news is that Jesus doesn't expect us to live right and achieve Christ-likeness on our own. And if you're not a Christian this morning, then you too need to realise you can't do it on your own. You need to do what every Christian needed to do, and that is be believe that Jesus is Lord, turn your back on the world and start living like Jesus wants you to live. And then be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins and something almost unexplainable happens during your baptism. Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit".

Peter says, when a person is baptised they receive the forgiveness of sins, not before baptism as some like to believe and not some time later like others like to believe. But at your baptism is where you receive the forgiveness of your sins and you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In some mysterious way which is difficult to explain, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your being. And one of the reasons we are given the gift of His presence within us is to help us become more Christ-like. So your not alone loved ones, for the Christian the Holy Spirit is working in and through you to help you to live a life which pleases God.

But if you haven't been baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, then your still on your own. Let me encourage you to accept God's offer of grace and be baptised, so that your sins will be forgiven and you too will have the help of the Holy Spirit to live right for God.