

“SOME THINGS JUST NEVER CHANGE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 1:22 – 2:3

The Imperishable Seed.

Last month Phama and I had the blessing of visiting with Leslie and her new husband, Tate. We delivered new Bibles to them from our church to replace their Bibles that were burned when their home burned down while they were in Hawaii for their wedding and honeymoon (October 29, 2015). When we met with them they told us an amazing story.

When the fire marshal finally let them into their home to look for anything salvageable they went in their bedroom and on the two night stands were the crumpled ashes of several books but their two Bibles were intact, singed around the edges, with smoke and water damage but intact, you could open them and read them. All the other books unrecognizable ashes.

And get this, the fire marshal said he had seen the same thing many times before.

What a picture of the imperishable Word of God. Peter sets before us the fact of imperishable seed which is the living and abiding Word of God which has been preached to you. Scripture reflects its author. Whatever you can say about God you can say about the Bible.

Just as God is eternal and everlasting, so is His book.

Just as God is the same yesterday, today and forever, so is His book.

Just as God is true and trustworthy, so is His book.

Just as God is holy, righteous and just, so is His book.

Just as God is good, wise and discerning, so is His book.

Just as God is unchangeable, so is His book.

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

This is mightier than every sword, wiser than every philosophy, more powerful than every army, more unchangeable than every new generation with its new culture and new fads and traditions and beliefs.

You can rail against this, you can reject it, hate it, despise it, neglect it or just ignore it. You can argue against it until you are blue in the face and the cows come home, but when the day is done or the life has been lived, the Word of God will win, it will be what is left standing.

This is why we preach the Word. It's good news, it's ancient news, it's relevant news, it's forever news. Any preaching not based on the eternal Word of God is irrelevant. If it isn't eternal it's toast, destined for fire and ashes.

This book is the anvil that was worn out the hammers of neo-orthodoxy and liberalism, of Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormonism, of materialism, socialism, communism, and capitalism, the hammer of new age, open theism, positive thinking, wealth and health gospel, the hammer of atheism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism and every other ism that has or will ever come along.

The Word of God is not some remote thing, something out there or something up there in heaven. It has come down and been revealed to us through preaching. The Word of God has been made for us, destined for us, sent to us.

Deuteronomy 8:3 Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

The Fruit of the Imperishable Seed.

Two truths to take to heart from this text. The Word of God lasts forever and it gives life and the life it gives lasts forever. Some things never change. The fact of the imperishable Word needs a response, some fruit.

The first fruit of the imperishable Word sown in your heart is being *born again*. This comes only by the Gospel being preached and heard and believed. We cannot be Christians without hearing and believing the Truth of God.

John 1:12-13 To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 3:3-6 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Peter's exhortations scattered in this text are that we should live a life that reflects our new birth according to the Word. If we have been given new life by the Spirit then let us walk by the Spirit. Do we look and act and speak more like the children of Adam or the children of God?

The second fruit is to purify your souls. But we don't have the power to do that, so how is this possible? By the Spirit through the Word. Offer your heart and soul to God that He may make you clean and pure, giving you a desire for such things.

Do you want to remain as you are or do you want to increase in spiritual growth and maturity and Christ-likeness? Purity is seen in obedience to the truth, to the Word of God.

A child's heart is seen most clearly in their obedience, do they do what their parents ask them to do? Our hearts are most clearly seen in our obedience to what our heavenly Father ask us to do.

The problems in my marriage stem largely from my sin and from not knowing and doing God's Word. The problems in my parenting are due in large part from my sin and from not knowing and doing God's Word. My problems in my other relationships and in my job come from not listening and obeying God's Word. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, "you are in error because you do not know the Scriptures and the power of God" (Mark 12:24).

Purify your souls through obedience to the imperishable Word.

Another one of the fruits that God desires to see in our lives is *love for one another*. This is the greatest evidence of a Biblically lived life. This is how we show we are Christians, by our love for one another. How we act, how we speak, how we talk to others about each other, how we make allowances and how we forgive and how we help.

We love ourselves quickly and easily, but a sincere love for each other is hard. Again, it is not possible on our own, we need the Holy Spirit of God working through the Word of God.

I Timothy 1:5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

And not just love one another but love one another earnestly, fervently. Not lazily, not when it's convenient, not when it feels good, or when we already like the other person, or when we get some benefit or advantage from it or just once or every now and then.

As Paul prayed in Philippians, may our love abound more and more (Philippians 1:9).

A final fruit is to put away everything contrary to the Word, everything that comes from the flesh. Peter just gives a very partial list, just a few examples, but by these examples we are to understand he means all such things.

Paul gives a longer yet still incomplete list in Galatians:

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 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.

New actions should follow from a new life.

I heard this week about a man not in this church who has gone to church all his life, twice every Sunday, whose words and actions, whose treatment of his wife and children do not match his profession of faith. And all of this without repentance. We don't want that kind of fruit.

When our words and actions don't match our testimony it should break our hearts, it should humble us to confess and repent, it should be followed with tears, with remorse, with a desire for God's help to walk in newness of life, with a desire for a pure heart.

Cultivating the Imperishable Seed.

Some of you are stuck in a kind of spiritual complacency, you have been drifting along for so long you think it's permanent. Maybe other people have deep or close relationships with God but you aren't like those other people, you are just stuck with the kind of relationship you have. Others might have strong desires or more passion, but not you, that's not who you are.

Do you feel stuck, do you feel like you stopped growing years ago and this is just as good as it gets? When the Bible talks about delighting in God or hungering for more of God or being more fervent or zealous, do those verses just go right over your head?

Peter blows that kind of thinking out of the water. He says no to spiritual fatalism, to spiritual defeatism, to spiritual passivity or resignation.

He tells us to *long for pure spiritual milk* that we may grow up in our salvation. The word long means desire, crave, yearn, thirst, want more. To put it in Oklahoma talk, it means to have a greater hankering for or a bigger itch for or to be willing to give your eyeteeth for.

We hear David write in Psalm 42:

Psalm 42:1-2 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

That's great for him but we aren't the Psalmist. That sounds like a foreign language.

How can Peter command us to have desires we don't have? How do you get a longing for something you don't long for? That's like commanding a crippled man to walk or a blind man to see. Oh, wait, there is someone who did that. What do you think, maybe that's how it works.

We are being given a command that we can't do by ourselves but there is someone who wants to do it for us if we will ask in sincere faith.

I am reminded of the famous words of Augustine who was struggling to do what Scripture commanded and in desperation he cried out, "God, command whatever you will and then grant what you command."

I think of Lazarus dead four days in the tomb. When Jesus commanded him to come out, how did Lazarus obey that command? Jesus enabled him to obey it, Jesus breathed the breath of new life into him and he came out.

When the Psalmist says thirst for the living God, when Peter says long for pure spiritual milk, and desire to taste that the Lord is truly good, don't say that's not you or you can't do it.

God wants that for you. If you are born again through the imperishable and living Word then you are meant to long for and desire the pure spiritual milk of the Word just like a baby craves milk. And there is the secret. Since your spiritual life began by the Word, your spiritual life is sustained by the Word and it grows by the Word.

If the Word of God is powerful enough to make us born again, to lift us from death to life, if it is powerful enough to overcome malice and deceit and all sin, it's certainly powerful enough to create new desires and new longings we never had before.

You do have to deal with the sin in your heart. A heart full of malice or deceit or guile or anger or greed or lust or pride won't desire things that are true and pure and good.

Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Don't be a defeatist or a pessimist. Don't give up, don't just sit there in the dark. That reminds me of my favorite light bulb joke. How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb? None, "I'll just sit here in the dark."

Don't take that attitude about your soul. Stir up desire by turning to God's Word and ask God to give you greater desires and deeper longings. Ask God to give you a hunger and a thirst for truth and righteousness and eternal things. Ask God to change your heart, that's what God is in the business of doing.

I asked Wayne Groen for permission to use him as an example. Wayne has been using his time in prison to create new desires and he is doing it with the Word of God. He is reading 10-12 pages of the Bible every day. He will finish on January 25. He goes to church every Sunday there and to a Bible Study once a week and invites other guys to come. He is doing a couple of devotionals each day, one with Nicki. He has been e-mailing me questions he has from the Bible or a Bible Study or devotional.

What are you doing to stir up longings and create new desires? That's why I give out Bible reading plans every year. That's why I have memory verses printed every month. That's why I stand before you twice every Sunday and preach the living and active Word of Truth to you. That's why we have Men's Bible Studies and Women's Bible Studies.

When you come to worship every Sunday pray for the Spirit to open your eyes and ears, to make your heart fertile and plowed soil to receive the imperishable seed of God's Word. Every time you open your Bible start with a prayer that God would give you a hunger and a thirst. Read Psalm 19 and 119 once in a while to stir up greater desire and longing for His Word.

Psalm 19:7-8, 10 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Pray as the Psalmist prays, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalmist 119:18).

Don't come to worship thinking to yourself, "OK, pastor, go ahead and shoot your best shot, say something that will really get my attention, come on try to have a really good sermon so I get something out of it."

I can guarantee you that will not increase any longings or hunger or desire. Humble yourself before God and ask Him, plead with Him like a person whose very soul depends on it, because it does. Ask God to do for you what you have not done and can't do.

Ephesians 5:14-17 "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."
15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

God reveals Himself in His Word. God speaks to our hearts through His Word. God answers prayers through His Word.

Since you have been born again through imperishable Word, bear fruit in keeping with that Word and cultivate a hunger and thirst for the pure spiritual milk of the true and eternal Word of God. It is your life. Love God, love His Word and love one another.

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man who[se] ... delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.