

“A LIFESTYLE OF SOJOURNERS AND EXILES.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 2:11-12

Introduction.

Beloved. Peter loves those he is writing to, this is a love letter, full of compassion, care and concern.

But the one writing this letter through Peter loves also and His love extends not just to them but to us. This letter is one of countless expressions of God’s love for us.

Have you ever had some one really important, really busy, really wise, turn aside to you and give you special time and attention and focus? Have you ever felt honored by such an action? This is that to you this morning.

Beloved by God, sojourners and exiles in this world, once not a people but now a people, God is speaking to you, He cares more about you and your soul than you or anyone else. Listen to the very words of God to you this morning. They are His warm embrace.

I John 3:1-2 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. ... 2 Beloved, we are God's children now.

As Peter writes, so I feel as I preach and teach and pray and minister here. I carry a deep burden for this flock and for your souls. You are loved by God and by your pastor.

Beloved, I preach to you who are sojourners and exiles in this land.

Sojourners and exiles.

Let’s face it none of us likes being a misfit. We all want to fit in. We all hate to be a part of something where these are not my people and I don’t belong here. That’s what Peter says is the Christian’s experience in this world. This world is not our home. As followers of Christ we have no ethnic or geographic or political identity.

We are called out of the world into a new nation, that means no borders or nationality or race or political label. We don’t belong to America, or the Republican party, or some Dutch ethnic group.

Why are we sojourners and exiles, foreigners and strangers in this world (1:1)? Because we are beloved. Because we have been “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers ... with the precious blood of Christ” (I Peter 1:18-19).

Because we are God's elect, chosen by God from out of the world. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own possession. We belong to God.

God's love has changed our status and identity. We are the true *homeless* people of this world, the transients. Don't look down on that person on the street corner with the cardboard sign, he is us, we are him. He's a reminder to us of how we should consider ourselves in this world.

The Chinese students among us live with constant reminders that they are aliens in a foreign land filled with strange customs and ways of saying things and the things we eat or don't eat.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

Air Force One does not bring in God's kingdom. God has a candidate and I can tell you who it is, it's Jesus Christ. He is our only hope for our country and world. Not one of those running for president will lead us to a better future, only Jesus will.

Hebrews 13:14 Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

Philippians 3:20 our citizenship is in heaven.

We are only guests here, passing through, on a brief visit. Live aware that we belong to a far country and that life here is fragile and short. Don't get too attached.

As Christians we should increasingly feel the disconnect as our culture moves farther and farther away from moral standards and values once influenced by the Gospel. We should be increasingly uncomfortable and out of place with what is depicted in movies and on TV and in social conversations or on social media. Don't become comfortable, don't conform, don't try to fit in or blend in.

Don't subscribe to the saying, "When in *Rome*, do as the Romans do?" Not with regard to sin.

How are we to live and act and work in this foreign land? Peter gives us *two responses*, first to fight hard and then to live well or beautifully.

The flesh's war against our soul.

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

If we get too attached to this world, we will become entangled in the pursuits of this world.

Do you want to know if you are entangled? Just ask yourself, what holds your attention most? What dominates your thoughts the most? Life on earth or life to come in heaven? Where do we

dwell mentally the most? What do you set your mind on? What do you think about? What your mind dwells on is what it becomes like.

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. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Abstain, distance yourself from, don't touch or get close to, put to death. It's in the present tense which means continually keep away from it all the time.

Abstain from what? Passions or desires. Are those bad? It depends on what kind. Desire is a neutral word until we know what it is attached to. Desire to help, desire to bless, desire to glorify God. Those are all good. But Peter isn't talking about those kinds of desires.

He tells us abstain from the passions of the flesh.

What are they? Whatever appeals to the flesh, to fleshly desires, to our old nature. Whatever is contrary to God, to His Word, to His will, to His glory.

Peter mentioned some in chapter 2:1, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Later in this letter he will write about living no longer for human passions:

I Peter 4:3 ... for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

Galatians 5:13-25 is a good commentary on this verse. Paul lists fifteen sinful desires. He starts with sexual sins and immorality and ends with drunkenness and orgies. And in between he lists a host of sins of the mind, will and emotions: "idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy" (Galatians 5:20-21).

This battle must be fought on every front. We must engage the enemy in our hearts and fight against sinful appetites of the flesh, against bad moods and attitudes, out of control tongues or emotions, wrong motives, whatever calls us to forsake our God and His Word and will.

If we are comfortable with the enemies of our souls, we are in a very spiritual dangerous place. Why? Because these desires want to kill you, to destroy your soul forever. How? By deceiving you and blinding you to the marvelous light of God's truth and God's will and God's good pleasures.

Jesus warns of this in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed about the seed of the Word of God that falls among the thorns.

Mark 4:18-19 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

These desire are deceitful, they are lying to you. They are saying if you do this or that you will be happier, you will be better off. I want a new phone. I want the latest iThing. I want more money, a new car, a new back deck, a nicer vacation. I want to hold on to this anger because I am right and it feels good. I want to look at those pictures or that video because it feels good. I want to win, to get in the last word. I deserve more recognition.

When Peter exhorts us to stay away from these inward desires he is saying something we need to take to heart. He is saying these seemingly uncontrollable desires are in fact not uncontrollable, they are able to be restrained.

This flies in the face of our modern culture that says that we need to give free reign to our desires and passions and urges. If it feels good do it.

Control comes not from our self or our willpower, but from the Spirit of holiness who gives us the enabling grace. What God commands He also enables. We have the Spirit of self-control.

War against our soul.

Why abstain? Because these passions continually wage war against our souls.

Think about it. None of us have any inclination to travel to North Korea or Iran or Afghanistan. There are at least another dozen other countries we would carefully avoid. We avoid going into parts of cities that are known for high crime.

Where there is the possibility of bodily harm, we are especially careful and prudent. So why do we so willingly and easily put our souls in harm's way, so easily embrace enemies who can destroy our souls? Around them we lay down our weapons and take off our armor.

Jesus says it's crazy to think that way, it's backwards He says. Don't fear those who can kill your body, that's nothing. Fear those who can kill your body and soul.

Luke 12:4-5 I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

I Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

He is out to devour our very souls by whatever means and every means. Don't give him a foothold, don't let him establish a beach head. "Be killing sin or it will be killing you" (John Owen). Wage war against the flesh because it is waging war against us.

We are in a war zone here on earth, all the more reason to be exiles. Who wants to take up permanent residence in a war zone?

We are soldiers with an enemy, a fierce opposition that is after our souls. What we are talking about is deadly. You don't want to be a soldier who is cavalier, who brushes it off as no big deal, who is cocky or unprepared for serious realities.

To be naïve about this war or to be casual about it or to not think it is particularly serious for us is folly.

Beloved, remember who you are and what you are and why you are. As one loved by God and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus and destined for a better home, abstain from all that corrupts and kills your soul. This is not your home, this is not your world, a far better one awaits. Abstain from and kill everything that will hinder your progress to that place.

Good deeds that glorify God.

Once we have dealt with inner realities, we must also give attention to outward realities, that we not be hypocrites, living a double life or double standard.

How should we *conduct* ourselves in this world of ours in which we are aliens and strangers?

Peter is going to get specific about our conduct in the world and how it is to look different from the world. The rest of his letter will address this. These two verses give us the general principles and the rest of the letter to chapter 5:11 will be about how live in the midst of an unbelieving world.

How we act in the political realm, how we act in the business or vocational world, how we act in our homes and marriage, how we act under trial and in suffering and in the face of injustice, how to use our gifts and talents, and how to conduct ourselves in our church, both as members and as officers.

As you continually abstain from that which continually wages war against you, so also continually maintain good conduct among unbelievers. Live a life consistent with your identity in Christ, live as a beloved follower of Him who rescued you from this world and redeemed you with His own blood.

Peter says conduct our life in an honorable way, meaning in an attractive manner or in an inviting way, live a beautiful life.

We all know people like this, Christians who live in a way that is beautiful, not proud, not showing off, not saying they are better than everyone else, just in a way that reflects Jesus.

They reflect kindness, generosity, genuine love, fairness, patience, making allowances for others, the common graces of a well lived life, the fruit of the spirit. They are like a cool breeze, a refreshing spring of water, they are a joy to be around.

We are to do good and to speak good and leave the results to God, with the understanding that one day, and maybe not until the very last day, God will be glorified.

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.

Our deeds should bear witness to the light and not to the darkness.

The world is watching. You don't know what aspect of our life will make a difference and be used by God in the life of a spouse, a neighbor, a colleague, a classmate, a friend or business acquaintance.

They may see some outward good and ask where it comes from. Why would they ask? What has to be present in order for them to ask the question? They have to see something that doesn't make sense, something they can't explain or account for.

Why are you acting this way, why are you speaking in a manner different from everyone else in this situation? That is what will spark the question, will get their attention.

If they see some extra measure of humility or patience or joy or courage or denying of self to the point they just have to ask where you are getting your confidence or contentment or peace or hope and you point to Jesus, then God is glorified.

Or is your life, your words and actions, so enculturated, so middle class American normal, so harmless or quiet in this evil world that you fit right and no one notices any difference between you and the pagans. Do people think you are just a nicer than average pagan? When the Gospel and the truth about Jesus is being maligned or laughed at or mocked on TV or by political candidates do we just brush it off? Do we laugh at the foul humor we hear?

Beloved, may your honorable conduct exhibited in good works be rooted in love for God and for others, regardless of how they receive it or treat you, knowing this, that in due season it will result in glory our God, who calls you out of this world and calls you Beloved.

Prayer: Holy Father, you have loved us with a great love and you have demonstrated it to us in countless tangible acts of grace, but most of all in the redeeming love of Jesus. Thank you for these strong words, for this spiritual meat and milk. Forgive us for our too long indulgence of our flesh and our inattentiveness to our eternal souls. Enable us by your Word and Spirit to sojourn well in this life, that what the world sees in your church would lead to glory to God.