

“MAKING A BREAK WITH SIN.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

June 6, 2016, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: I Peter 4:1-6

Prayer: Holy Father, here we are gathered again as we have countless hundreds and thousands of times before. It's easy to become complacent and comfortable; it is also easy to want our ears tickled, to hear something that will make us feel better or will suit our own interests. Help us now to submit to your Holy Spirit and hear what your Spirit wants to say to each of us and to this church this morning. Help me and all of us I pray, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Introduction.

Time. What is the value of time? What do you think of time?

To realize the value of one year, ask a student who failed a grade.

To realize the value of one month, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of one week, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of one hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realize the value of one minute, ask a person who missed the train.

To realize the value of one second, ask a person who just avoided an accident.

To realize the value of one millisecond, ask a person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Churches have very different perspectives and values on time.

I once preached at Apache Reformed Church in Apache, OK about an hour south of OKC.

They informed me of a thing called Indian time but I wasn't prepared for how different it was.

At 11 there were just a few people there and no pianist. At 11:10 a few more and still no

pianist. At 11:15 the elders told me to go ahead, just as I was announcing the opening hymn the pianist walked in and so we waited until she was ready.

We think that everyone being in their pew before 10:30 is normal and right, but not every church is like this. Different cultures have completely different views of time.

You graduates have just completed a major chapter in your life. If you live to 72 you are already a quarter of the way through your life. What are you going to do with the rest before the sands of your time run out?

How much time do we have left on earth? What remains of our allotted span of days? How do you want to use the days that remain for you?

Does the reality of eternity have any impact on how you think about your days and the years that remain? How will we live the rest of our days in the flesh? That's the question Peter asks.

Arm yourselves for greater things.

To make the best use of your time, arm yourselves for greater things.

To arm yourself implies there is a battle to be fought and weapons of warfare are needed. This life is a battle and we should be dressed for battle, to wage war with the enemy of our souls and of our time on earth.

Peter is picking up and resuming what he said back in 3:18.

I Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to suffer and die for our sins. He came to be afflicted in His flesh by our sins and for our sins. He came armed for battle, to make a final assault on sin and death. Christ defeated sin and death by the power of the Spirit, and He gives us His Spirit as our weapon against the sins of our flesh. Arm yourself with the invincible weapon of the Holy Spirit.

By the Spirit we are armed to do battle with sin. What does "whoever has suffered in the flesh *has ceased from sin*" mean?

We know that "cease from sin" cannot mean no longer sins. In this life we will always sin.

Peter has been writing about suffering for doing what is right or suffering for righteousness sake. From that context Peter is saying a person who is suffering for doing what is right is a person who has *made a clean break with sin*. They have put obeying God above avoiding hardship or trouble. They would rather take their lumps for doing the will of God than avoid any unpleasant consequences by sinning.

Jesus did that when He choose God's will over His own will, when He choose to suffer rather than sin.

A person who has aligned himself with Christ has made a break from the easy life, from the broad and safe path, from a selfish and self-centered life. He has made a break from a life of pleasure and just doing what he wants. He has made a break from a life of compromise. It means committing to a life of sacrifice, to putting others first, a willingness to suffer loss.

At some point in your life you have to decide if Jesus is worth suffering for, if He is worth more than sin. When you come to the point of making that decision, that will be your break from sin.

Are you willing to suffer by doing what's right? Are you willing to give up certain things? Are you willing to put certain things to death? Are you willing to die to yourself and your sinful pleasures or desires and live for the will of God?

Make the most of your time by arming yourself against your flesh to do the will of God which is the greater thing.

Leave behind lesser things.

Peter moves on to flesh out this new heart, this new spirit, this walking by the Spirit rather than the flesh.

A person who is making a break with sin is like a person drawing a line in the sand and saying no more. I am not going back to those old ways, those old paths. Why return to the wandering paths of ignorance and fleeting pleasures?

Let all your past life of sin be enough. If your past life wasn't that sinful, let it be enough. If your past life was very sinful, let it be enough.

Peter gets specific and gives six examples of the sorts of things Gentiles like to do, meaning people who are not Christians, not lovers and worshippers and followers of Jesus. These were some of the common sins of their culture and their day.

The list can be summed up as a person who is living without regard to moral restraint, who is following their physical desires and appetites.

This was a part of their past. What was normal when you were not a Christian or living as a Christian, let that be no more.

Too often we only remember the fleeting pleasure and forget the guilt and shame and bondage. Why go back to re-crucify Christ all over again? Why make that mess for Him to clean up again?

Did you notice the people in the parade yesterday who followed behind the horses? What a humbling job. What a Christ like job? I wonder how we would think of our sin if every time we sinned we were aware that Christ was standing right there behind us to clean up after us? Would we find as much joy or satisfaction or pleasure in it? Would it become an incentive to seek His help by His Spirit to make a break with our sin?

The Christian life is a life of mortifying the flesh or killing sin. When we identify with Christ in His suffering, when we share His understanding and attitude about sin, when we hate it and wrestle with all our might to leave it behind in the power of the Spirit.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian and philosopher, told a parable he called “The Wild Duck of Denmark.”

“A wild duck was flying northward with his mates across Europe during the springtime. En route, he happened to land in a barnyard in Denmark, where he quickly made friends with the tame ducks that lived there. The wild duck enjoyed the corn and fresh water. He decided to stay for an hour, then for a day, then for a week, and finally, for a month. At the end of that time, he contemplated flying to join his friends in the vast North land, but he had begun to enjoy the safety of the barnyard, and the tame ducks had made him feel so welcome. So he stayed for the summer. One autumn day, when his wild mates were flying south, he heard their quacking. It stirred him with delight, and he enthusiastically flapped his wings and rose into the air to join them. Much to his dismay, he found that he could rise no higher than the eaves of the barn. As he waddled back to the safety of the barnyard, he muttered to himself, “I’m satisfied here, I have plenty of food, and the area is good. Why should I leave?” So, he spent the winter on the farm. In the spring, when the wild ducks flew overhead again, he felt a strange stirring within his heart, but he did not even try to fly up to meet them. When they returned in the fall, they again invited him to rejoin them, but this time, the duck did not even notice them. There was no stirring within his heart. He simply kept on eating corn which made him fat.”

What a picture of American Christianity. We have feasted so long on all the good things of life that we think this is the destination. We have forgotten that this is not our home, that our souls are meant to long for a far country. We hear the Gospel message as a distant noise in our ears, but ignore it and continue to feed on the husks of this world.

The greatest danger that faces each of us is losing our souls to sin. And one of the reasons this danger is so great is because it is so subtle. No other loss we experience in life happens so quietly. If you lost a hundred dollar bill from your wallet you would notice. If you lost an arm or a leg in an accident you would notice. If you lost a child or spouse you would notice. None of those things would sneak by you.

But we can lose our soul to sin, to worldly pleasures or passions or pursuits and not even notice. The one thing that matters more than anything else can slowly slip away into the darkness of sin.

Fight the darkness, fight any complacency with sin, any friendship with the world. Say enough. Don’t settle, keep your heart tuned to the Gospel that calls us out of this world and to a better life to come.

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.

Rise up, O men of God, have done with lessor things.

The personal costs

Peter mentions two costs when we arm ourselves for greater things and leave behind lesser things.

First, old friends or neighbors or co-workers will be surprised. Apparently some of the Christians in the church in Peter's day lived quite a past, a kind of out of control chasing after every kind of pleasure. Like the loose living of the prodigal son in Luke 15.

They will be surprised because they don't understand why you wouldn't want to live a little, loosen up, have some fun. They can't imagine fun or happiness coming in some other way than in paths of sin.

Second, their surprise turns to ridicule, mocking, being made fun of for not joining in the fun. They become hostile. People who feel judged by your way of life will speak against you.

Those with a bad conscience will always turn on those who make their consciences feel bad. People with bad consciences hate it when anything or anyone pricks their conscience and awakens them to the possibility that what they are doing or how they are living might be wrong.

I talked to my sons before going to college to beware of professors who make fun of or mock or belittle their faith. Those with a bad conscience appease their conscience by trying to get you to join them. Misery loves company and so does a bad conscience. And if you won't join them, then they will protect their guilty conscience by turning on you.

A Christian's silent non-participation in sin feels to a non-Christian like condemnation, even if they don't say a word. And rather than be convicted and repent or change, they attack to justify themselves. They call Christians self-righteous or intolerant or haters or judgmental even when you haven't judged.

R.C. Sproul tells an old story of Billy Graham playing a round of golf with President Ford and a couple of PGA golf pros. After the round a friend asked one of the pros how the round went and he went off about Billy Graham stuffing religion down his throat. Later after the pro had settled down the friend followed up saying Billy must have come on a little strong out there. The pro replied, "No, he didn't even mention religion. I just had a bad round."

Sproul summarizes the incident, "Billy Graham is so identified with religion, so associated with the things of God, that his very presence is enough to [make them] feel the hound of heaven breathing down their neck. They feel crowded by holiness, even if it is made present only by an imperfect, partially sanctified human vessel" (R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*).

Don't despise the personal costs. You don't know how God may be using your presence. You don't know what will be thought of while lying in bed, how the Spirit will use you to convict a

sinner of his sin. You don't know if those who once mocked you will later be put to shame (I Peter 3:16) or will see your good deeds and glorify God (I Peter 2:12).

Pray for them, pray for your enemies, pray for your accusers. They will all face a terrible judgment if they don't hear the Gospel and repent and turn from their own sins.

The personal triumph

Peter encourages Christians to persevere by remembering that we don't just live for this life. When our time runs out here, there is a life to come and there is a judge of this life and of all the deeds committed in this life.

Trust yourself and your life to God who will make all things right in the end. Whatever persecution or unpleasantness you have endured for your faith will be remembered and vindicated. Patiently wait for that time when we will be approved by God.

The Gospel you heard and believed and obeyed is not in vain. It will deliver you in death. Death does not keep Christ from being our defender and vindicator.

Implications and Application.

Time is running out. Are we all prepared for the judgment and are we preparing those we love around us? Are we making the most of our time? Do we live with enough sense of God's holiness and God's judgment and is it an incentive to holy and faithful living?

Do this in dependence on Christ and His Spirit and His Word, rather than in dependence on ourselves. Holiness is not the way to Jesus, Jesus is the way to holiness.

Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of Kings.

Prayer: Holy Father, enable us by your Holy Spirit to live for Christ and if necessary to suffer for Christ. Help us to remember that even the worst in this life is nothing compared to the best that is to come, to the glory we will share with you in heaven. Strengthen your people, your church, here and around the world today. May we all stand together firm in the faith as salt and light in the darkness.