

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

A Fight For Souls And Glory

October 21st, 2018

1 Peter 2:11-12

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 2:11; that's on page 1015 in your pew Bibles. The passage we are reading today is generally considered to be something of a hinge within the letter. Before this passage Peter is really focused on helping these people grow up. A couple of weeks ago the title of our message was How To Grow Up In A Hurry. Peter knows that a storm is coming. In the Spirit he knows that wave after wave after wave of formal and fatal persecution is going to break over this little congregation – so he wants them to be ready. He wants them to be strong. He wants them to grow up. Last week we talked about how as we take hold of Christ we GROW UP into a spiritual house, into a holy nation, into a royal priesthood. So the focus has been on growing up. Peter has put these folks into the Green House you might say in order to expedite their process of Christian growth and sanctification.

But now, in this passage, it's like Peter is walking them to the threshold of the Green House and he is telling them what to expect in the Big Bad World Outside. From this point on the letter is about ACTION. It's about living your faith OUT in a hostile world.

The counsel Peter gives here could be compared in that sense to the counsel that an officer in the army might give to new recruits about to leave behind the safety of Basic Training in order to head out on their first real combat deployment. He tells them the truth about what they are likely

to experience, he tells them why what they're doing matters and he reminds them of the goals and objectives that they are collectively committed to. That's how this passage is set up – this is wartime counsel; there is a warning given, an opportunity described and an ultimate goal reiterated.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 11:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11–12 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Well, as I mentioned, there are three parts to this message of encouragement. The first thing Peter does is give them fair warning. He tells them that the Christian life is going to be a battle.

The Warning: The Christian life is going to be a battle

He says in verse 11:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11 ESV)

When you step across this threshold, beloved – when you leave the safety of the Green House and go out into the Big Bad World Outside – you are going to get hit immediately from two different directions. First of all you are going to face pressure from the alien and hostile culture of the world. He tells them that they are sojourners and exiles – two words which basically mean the same thing and that are intended to remind them that they are entering FOREIGN and HOSTILE territory. Remember that in the previous paragraph Peter told them that as they take hold of Christ they are becoming a HOLY NATION – they are becoming something different. FOR A PURPOSE. The purpose is to CALL PEOPLE OUT OF DARKNESS INTO MARVELLOUS LIGHT.

You are different for a reason!

That's what Peter's been saying, but now he is saying that as soon as you cross this threshold – as soon as you leave this church and walk out into the parking lot you will face pressure to conform to the patterns and ways of the culture. You are going to be calling to the dark AND THE DARK IS GOING TO BE CALLING TO YOU. And you dare not conform.

For Christians to be SUCCESSFUL in their mission and calling they have to maintain a certain distance and distinction from the world. Peter is just saying here what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said:

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.” (Matthew 5:13 ESV)

Jesus is saying you can't influence the world if you become just like the world. I'm sending you out to call into the darkness – not to drift into the darkness. So watch out! Because as soon as you cross this threshold – as soon as you leave this place – you will fall under the sound of the world. You will hear the siren song and if you listen to it you will be lured onto the rocks and you will lose your ministry and you will lose your soul.

So watch out! It's a battle out there!

And, he says, it's a battle in here! You've got to resist the culture but you've also got to resist your own sinful desires. Edmund Clowney says here:

“Christians are also warriors, repulsing the attacks of fleshly lusts that war against the soul.”¹

So there is a battle out there and there is a battle IN HERE.

Now, we have to be careful not to limit what the Bible means here by “the lusts of the flesh”. Many of us hear that as if it ONLY refers to sexual temptation – or maybe to sexual temptation and to the temptation to alcohol or drug abuse. Certainly it is that but it is more than that. Thom Schreiner says here:

¹Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, ed. John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 102.

“Such desires cannot be confined to sexual sins or sins of the body like drunkenness. We have already seen in 2:1 that believers are warned against “social” sins like slander and envy”.²

So “the lusts of the flesh” basically refer to desires that run more in line with how things are done out there than how things ought to be done in here. They are desires that are in line with cultural norms but not in line with KINGDOM NORMS. What Peter is saying is that the pressure to be like the world – to lose our saltiness and to conform to culture – doesn’t just come from the outside – it comes from the inside. We WANT to behave in “carnal” and “worldly” ways. But if we do, then we lose our ability to serve as ambassadors of a coming kingdom. So we have to resist that.

And the fact that Peter commands us to resist those desires implies that we CAN RESIST THOSE DESIRES. That is very important for us to see. In our culture most people believe that desire is destiny. But that’s not what the Bible says. The Bible says that because of sin and because of our history as human beings, all of us are born with CONTRARY DESIRES – twisted desires – desires that are less than fully human and that if heeded will lead us into ruin. But the Bible also says that if we maintain a spirit of humility – if we confess those desires when we feel them – and if we ask God for grace to overcome them – then we can. We can grow – we can mature – we can change – slowly but surely into the same image as Jesus Christ. If we are born again, and if we are filled with the Spirit then we can RESIST CONTRARY DESIRE and walk in step with the Spirit.

Thanks be to God - that’s what the Bible says. And that’s what Peter reminds them of before they cross the threshold into the Big Bad World Outside. It’s going to be a battle – but you can do this! By the grace of God and through supplies of the Spirit – you can do this.

The second thing he does is explain to them the strategic importance of the battle that they are engaged in. He is trying to help them see the opportunity in their struggle.

The Opportunity: The gap is good for the Gospel

As a pastor I can identify with the need to help your people see this. By and large, I think this is

² Thomas Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 121.

something that we all struggle to believe – so Peter is making it explicit here he is reminding them that **HOLINESS IS PART OF THE MISSION**. Listen to what he says in verse 12:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Holiness is part of the battle plan. Righteousness isn't incidental – it has critical strategic value.

Listen so many of us think that evangelism is **MERELY WHAT WE SAY**. We think that evangelism is what we do when we get somebody cornered on the bus, the train or the airplane. We pull out our 5 G's booklet and we tell them who God is, who they are and how God has saved us through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

That's evangelism – in our minds.

And of course, it is – but here Peter is saying that there is more to it than that. He is saying that **OUR HOLINESS IS ALSO EVANGELISM**. Listen again to what he says:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

This sounds very similar to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He said:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16 ESV)

Now don't you dare be too evangelical to hear what Peter and Jesus are saying here. I know that in conservative evangelical “reformed-ish” communities like ours there is a **REACTION** against those who have equated evangelism with good deeds. And so we have plunged head long into the ditch on the other side of the road and acted as if there was **NO CONNECTION** between good behaviour, good deeds and evangelism. Peter and Jesus are saying that the two must go hand in hand – so we don't get to be more spiritual than the Bible – we need to take this seriously. Peter is saying in this passage that our good deeds are **AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR EFFORTS TO CONVERT THE WORLD**.

Now notice also that he says that these good deeds are going to need to be done under HOSTILE FIRE FROM THE WORLD. He doesn't say: if you do good works the world will treat you well and speak kindly of you – no, no, he says:

when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

Do you hear that? Slander is assumed. Hostility is assumed.

But.

If you keep on doing good works then slowly but surely you are going to break through and you are going to gain a hearing for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand that?

One of the reasons that we do good deeds – not the only reason and maybe not even the first reason – but one of the reasons that we do good deed is that over the long haul, if we are consistent, slowly but surely, they will eventually buy us favour, earn us permission and eventually even build us a stage upon to preach the Gospel.

And as you would expect – given that this is inspired counsel – that is EXACTLY how things worked out in Christian history. If you study the history of Christian persecution in the Roman Empire you will discover that most outbreaks of formal and fatal persecution were actually very short lived as the Roman population complained to government because Christians were very valuable citizens. Don't kill these people, they said, they are fantastic neighbours! They take care of the sick and the old and the weak and we have come to depend on them. That many times, in many places – just as Peter seems to be suggesting here.

Finally then in terms of Peter's encouragement these folks – having given them a warning and explained the opportunity he takes a minute to remind them of their ultimate goal.

The Goal: The glory of God on the day of visitation

I'm referring here obviously to that ambiguous phrase at the end of the section. Look at verse 12 again, Peter says:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and **glorify God on the day of visitation**. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

That's a bit of an odd thing phrase isn't it? Peter isn't saying that if you keep your conduct honourable and if you do good deeds then all of your friends, neighbours and loved ones will eventually become Christians. He could have said that – but he didn't. He said that if you do that then all of your friends, neighbours and loved ones will eventually glorify God on the day of visitation.

That's the ultimate goal – the glory of God on the day of visitation – but what in the world does that mean? What is the day of visitation?

Well according to most scholars it likely means two things at once. Thomas Schreiner for example says:

“The “day of visitation” could refer to God's judgment or his salvation”.³

Are you seeing that? It is an intentionally ambiguous phrase. Meaning that Peter is saying that if you keep your conduct honourable and if you overwhelm your friends and neighbours with your love and good deeds then there are two possible outcomes. One is that they will repent and come to Jesus. They will realize that truly God is among us! They will repent of the ways that lead to death and ruin and they will be converted and baptized into the eternal kingdom of God. That could happen – that will happen in many cases – thanks be to God!

But it won't happen in all cases. God will be glorified in the conversion of many of your friends and neighbours – but he will ALSO be glorified in the final confession of your friends and neighbours should they persist in their rebellion all the way until the day of Final Judgment. Paul talks about that in Romans 14:11 and also in Philippians 2:10-11. He talks about how:

³ Thomas Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 123.

“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, **to the glory of God the Father.**” (Philippians 2:10–11 ESV)

Edmund Clowney says here:

In the day of God’s ‘visitation’, even those who misrepresented and hated the good works of Christians will *glorify God* for them.⁴

Are you hearing that?

Peter is saying that one way or the other God will be glorified. Either our friends and neighbours will be drawn to faith in Christ – or they will bow their knees and confess with their tongues at the final judgment that God’s ways are right and lead to life and their ways are wrong and lead to death and ruin. Either way – we will be vindicated and far more importantly God will be glorified on the day of his visitation.

So that’s Peter’s motivational speech to these baby Christians about to leave the Greenhouse and to cross over into the Big Bad World Outside.

Now in the time we have left I want to take on the role of the sergeant or the corporal in that company of new recruits about to be sent on active deployment. Peter has spoken to us as an officer. He has given us the big picture. He has told us that this won’t be easy, he’s said that this is going to be a fight, there’s going to be a cost but this battle matters in pursuit of final victory.

That’s a BIG PICTURE speech and now it’s up to the non-commissioned officers to put some feet on that. It’s their job to remind the soldiers to hit the beach running, to move from cover to cover. To maintain a good spread between soldiers as they advance and to drink lots of water and to keep your helmet on at all times. That’s PRACTICAL COUNSEL. In preaching we call that APPLICATION. It’s telling people what TO DO on the basis of what they’ve heard.

So I want to end today by giving you some practical battlefield counsel.

⁴Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, ed. John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 103.

Battlefield Counsel:

The first thing I'm going to say based on the text is this; you need to protect yourselves.

1. Protect Yourself

The Christian life is not a test of bravery – it's not about doing the most courageous and foolish things possible. It is not cowardice for soldiers to make use of all available cover as they advance upon the enemy. That's just wisdom! The Bible tells us again and again to protect ourselves from enemy fire. The Apostle Paul said to Timothy, FLEE YOUTHFUL LUSTS.

Flee also youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22 KJV)

Run away! Don't try to prove how brave you are by going to that party and maintaining your Christian testimony – just don't go to the party! Keep a safe distance between yourself and enemy fire. Listen friends, the Bible says this in both the Old Testament and the New. The Bible says GIVE EVIL A WIDE BERTH. Stay out of the field of fire! Solomon told his son to stay away from the adulterous woman. He said:

Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house (Proverbs 5:8 ESV)

Don't even walk down a street where you might see her doing something that would tempt you into ruin – it isn't hard to transpose that into a contemporary key is it? If Solomon were speaking to his son today he would say – don't even watch a movie that you know is going to tempt you to act in an immoral way. Don't even have an app on your phone that is going to bring you pictures of an adulterous woman. Keep away from her son – don't even go near the door of her house.

Run away!

Protect yourself!

And again, this is about more than sex, alcohol and drugs – it is about those things. Don't go to

places where you are going to be tempted with those things. But it's about more than that. Don't engage in conversations with people who tend to drag you into gossip, envy and slander. You may have to walk right by those people to maintain your saltiness – you may have to unfriend those people on Facebook – you are going to want to put some distance between yourself and that sort of enemy fire. That's what I'm saying.

It's a battle out there and you need to take steps to protect your soul.

The second thing I'm saying to you based on the text we just read is this:

2. Play Offense

Sometimes we can talk so much about defending ourselves and protecting ourselves that we forget to play offense – and that's a mistake. We have to do both. We have to take wise precautions and we have to make use of available cover – but we also have to remember to use the weapons at our disposal. Being an effective soldier is not just about NOT GETTING SHOT it is also about effectively using the weapons that have placed at your disposal. Well in the spiritual realm that means taking every opportunity to do good works. It means overwhelming our neighbours with our inexplicable conduct and charity.

That's what Peter says – that what Jesus says. Let your light so SHINE before others that they may SEE your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Don't forget to play offense!

Don't be SO CONCERNED to protect yourself that you never stick your neck out – that you never get involved – that you never step out so as to SHINE FORTH. We have to do that. It was doing that that bought time and space for the early Christians in Rome – and it will be doing that that buys us space in Orillia, Ontario Canada. Listen church, one of my goals is to make our congregation indispensable to this community so that if the government of Canada ever decides to take an interest in us the citizens of this city will rise up on mass and say: "Leave these people alone! We can't survive without them." We need to make that our goal as a church. That will buy us time and that will preserve our permission to preach and proclaim the Gospel.

Then lastly, based on what Peter is saying it is clear that all we actually need to do is:

3. Hold The Field

Peter doesn't say that we need to win the day – he just says that we need to hold the field. He makes it clear that it is JESUS who will usher in the final victory. He says:

so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:12 ESV)

All you've got to do Peter says, is stay faithful and engaged until Jesus takes the field.

Just keep growing. Just keep walking. Be the wives and the husbands and the children and the citizens that the Bible says you should be. Hold your ground – walk the walk – and wait for Jesus.

That's the game plan – and believe me friends - stability is a winning strategy when the rest of the world is going to hell in a handbasket.

This argument is going to make itself in the coming years, friends. Our culture is rapidly imploding. It was rapidly imploding even before our government decided to legalize marijuana – I can't imagine how fast things are going to fall apart out there now – but do not be afraid brothers and sisters. Do not despair! Yes, everything is shaking and changing and falling apart – but that ought only to make our job all the easier. Stability is about to become a very convincing argument for the Gospel of Jesus Christ – so friends – all you have to do is **HOLD OUR GROUND.**

Conclusion:

In the 80's and 90's, when I first started in ministry we all thought that innovation and creativity that would win the day – but now based on texts like this and experiences like the ones we are having now I am absolutely convinced that in reality, it's the exact opposite. It is

FAITHFULNESS AND ENDURANCE that will win the day. We just need to keep doing what the Bible says. We just need to keep doing Christian family. We just need to keep living the Sermon on the Mount. We just need to keep walking in step with the Spirit.

Hold your ground friends and watch as enemy fortresses begin to crack, shake and tumble to the ground.

It's Jericho all over again brothers and sisters – so we just need to hold our ground, we just need to walk our walk and blow our trumpets – and wait for the appearing of the Lord.

That's the text, that's the game plan and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.