

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "See God! Hear His truth!"

Text: 1 Peter 2:11-12

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- For a few weeks now, I have been crawling at a snail's pace through the exposition of a small section of 1 Peter chapter 2.
- My heart's deep desire and my prayer is for us, as FBC today, to have a clear understanding of Peter's picture of the church of Jesus operating in a dark world.
- That's exactly what we are and it's exactly where we now live.
- Together we serve as a *potentially* amazing *Living Temple of God* made up of *living* stones marking God's presence in the surrounding darkness. We are those *living stones*. We also serve together as God's holy priesthood in the world—as the called mediators of God's truth in a world of lies. Our slogan could be "**See God! Hear His truth!**"
- Last week, I'm not sure I made clear the references for the new verses we were covering. It was just verses 9 and a 10. These verses emphasized the *collective, corporate, communal* nature of our purpose as the church of Jesus showing God's presence and proclaiming God's truth.
- You can see this emphasis in the designations in 1 Peter 2:9-10... "a chosen PEOPLE," a royal priest-HOOD," a holy NATION," "a PEOPLE belonging to God." Each of these emphasizes a clear, *communal* identity for being the church in the world with the working slogan of "**See God! Hear His truth!**"
- You all know that we live in a highly *individualistic* culture. At best, people in our context sometimes gather into *tribes* based on an *affinity of sameness*. People gravitate to relationships with people more like them than different. However, even those tribal affinities quickly dissolve when they no longer feed the values of the individualism "baked into" our world's way of life.

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- Therefore, without some intentional effort to be explicit about our values *individually* and *corporately* as FBC we can so easily fall prey to the individualistic values of the world around us.
- When this happens, the church of Jesus *easily* becomes just about **ME** and what I want that makes **ME** comfortable rather than about **US** being a Living Temple, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people or even a *tribe* belonging to God **TOGETHER** with the communal slogan of "**See God! Hear His truth!**".
- Peter envisions that, somehow **TOGETHER**, we will declare this as the praise of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.
- Somehow, **TOGETHER**, we will shine the glory of God and His mercy as His living Temple that puts Him on display to the Creation and somehow, **TOGETHER**, we will be the mediators of His truth to the world.
- When I asked for her evaluation last week, my daughter, Beth, told me last week's sermon sounded *repetitive* of the week before. I would rather she had seen it as I intended it as an emphatic review by repetition. Today then, I will skip any more of an emphatic review by repetition beyond what I have already done this morning.
- But, here it is again, emphatically one last time today, because if we don't get this, we won't get the rest of what Peter has to say. We will instead assume he is teaching each of us individual moral principles to be good people individually for God.
- As Jesus' church, we have a rock bottom foundational governing purpose from God to be his Living Temple and his holy priesthood proclaiming Him in his glory in this dark world **TOGETHER**.

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- This truth ought to shape our FBC values, our FBC priorities and our FBC decisions as a church **TOGETHER** with the bumper sticker slogan being "***See God! Hear His truth!***"
- Does Peter have something specific in mind when he next says we are to be declaring God's praise in the darkness? Well...yes, as a matter of fact, he does. With connection to the context in mind, we move forward to the last two verses of this section that I believe is critical for us—FBC--today. Please look at 1 Peter 2:11 and 12. **READ 1 Peter 2:11-12**
- There Peter goes again with that "*dear friends*" bit which is actually the stronger "*be-loved.*" Could he really be saying the things he is saying out of love? Peter thinks he is. He is not as, Paul put it for the Corinthians, writing this to somehow "*Lord it over them,*" with his opinion and preferences. Rather he is saying this because he loves them deeply and wants to protect them from living for the wrong values and wasting their life as a church.
- The request he makes here in verse 11 is strong. It is a *beseeking*—a *begging* by Peter. It is not a good idea or a possible suggestion. It is critically important to Peter. I think I know how he feels.
- Once again, the apostle is clear in his repetition for emphasis. As easy as it is to forget it, this *world* is not our true home. We believers are foreigners living in a country that doesn't belong to us and to which we do not belong.
- Remember the apostle started this letter addressing his readers this same way as "*strangers in the world.*" This must be an important truth—a foundational matter—if he repeats it here when he is about to charge them with how to live in the world as the church of Jesus.
- I'm not sure how to emphasize sufficiently this reality of us not being at home in the world except by becoming as repetitive as Peter. This

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truth is no small thing. It shapes all of values that shape the church. It underlies all that the church is to be and do in the world.

- As "*at home*" as we can begin to feel in this world because of our relative wealth, our creature comforts, our entertainments, our distracting devices, our desire for safety, our drive for health to live as long as possible, our work to feel we are in control and so on—with nearly all our fleshly needs and desires able to be met or at least we can strive to meet them—as at home as his can make us feel because that is what the people of the world around us are doing everyday of their lives—***we are not at home!***
- Therefore, we are to knowingly and purposefully live as *strangers and alien—foreigners* living in a country we do not own and which does not own us even if it is easier just to go with the flow of the relatively good American life promised to the citizens of this world.
- **BELOVED**, as Peter would say, I do not think it is ever very easy for us to recognize just how much we have made ourselves *at home* in this world. Then, when someone even raises that issue, we can feel the heat rise within and the defensiveness that comes forth.
- "*Don't tell me how to live, Peter! Don't judge me and my choice of values and priorities that control me! You do your individual thing and I'll do my individual thing. Grace means we should live and let live as we choose!*"
- For the most part, we have made a tacit agreement as American believers never to address this with each other. My business is my business when it comes to my wealth and comfort. You leave me alone and I'll leave you alone. If you need one example, just ask yourself how much we cheerfully and openly share with one another about our "**PERSONAL**" finances and how we use them in the world. Why is that a mostly forbidden subject?

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- There are many potentially valid reasons for our reticence. However, not all of them are reasons that align with the biblical value of living as strangers and aliens to this world **TOGETHER**.
- So then, what does Peter urge, beseech or beg his readers who are not at home in the world to do? He begs them to **abstain** from or to **stay away from**, as the NIV puts it—from **sinful desires**.
- That sort of makes sense even to us individualistic morality focused Christians but it seems almost too obvious to me if that is all Peter means. It seems right that we should not be great sinners if we were to be able to declare God's praises in the dark world.
- When I look a little more deeply, I suspect, this is one of those places where the NIV translators were *too* consistent in always translating the Greek word "*sarx*" or "fleshly" desires as "**sinful**" desires.
- I suspect, Peter is following on with his idea of not being at home in this world. The way we become at home in this world is by living for the desires—that is, being controlled by or driven by those desires that are only connected with the life of this world.
- Not all those desires are innately sinful. We do need to eat and have shelter and some safety and such, but to be **controlled** even by the desire for these flesh-needs is--to live for them is.
- What values actually control how I live? My decisions and priorities—my actions and reactions? The needs of the flesh tied to this world that is not my home or some other values Peter has in mind that align with us being the church TOGETHER in a dark world?
- Let me say it again. What values drive our priorities and our choices? Are they valuing things of this world or valuing the mission of God we are on together? Some values lead to a focus on the felt needs of the flesh. Other values lead to praise for God in the darkness.

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- Peter says stay away from having controlling values driven by the desires of the flesh.
- Again, this too, is almost never easy to discern perfectly especially in times of peace and prosperity in the world. Persecution and suffering often clarify a person's true values. We are probably people with mixed values—some focused on the desires of our flesh—others focused on God and his mission.
- This difficult-to-discern matter is another reality of life in this world that we believers have often mutually agreed we will not discuss with one another. Peter says aloud what we have agreed not to say aloud in the comfortable church in our world. No wonder Peter has to keep saying "I love you guys"—by using the word for "*beloved*."
- Living for the "*desires of the flesh*," says Peter, is what causes us to waste our lives as believers TOGETHER in Jesus' church.
- His reason in the text is that being controlled by our "flesh desires," makes "*war against our souls*." Remember "soul" here is Peter's word for our living existence now—our life now before the world to come arrives.
- Living for all those immediately present "flesh-desires" that seem to demand our immediate attention is a waste of my life now as a believer.
- A church that lives for flesh-desires—even those churchy flesh desires that have become mutually acceptable desires that don't seem to be sinful—that church will waste *its* soul—it's very life in the world now will be worthless.
- That sort of church cannot be a good representative of the Living Temple and the "**See God! Hear His Truth!**" mission to the world.

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- My flesh is at home in this world but my real LIFE is not! The worldly desires of a church make it comfortably at home in this world but the divine design of the church means it is not.
- Peter is not finished with his exhortation to what will make a church save its soul. On the positive side rather than living for this world we should rather always be holding out what he calls "*good living*" or "*good behavior*" in our lives.
- I think this exhortation will certainly encompass my individual behavior but it is again more than just me not sinning and me instead being a good little boy.
- What is "good behavior" or "good living" anyway? People in our world used to agree what it was—what was "good." Not so anymore. Some people hold exactly the opposite behaviors as being "good."
- How will we decide what is "good behavior?" We will remember that Jesus' behavior—his way of living was called "good." He was the "**GOOD** shepherd." We can look at Jesus and see what it means to live a "good" life.
- He loved sincerely. He sacrificed humbly. He walked righteously by God's standards. He responded to God the Father obediently. He valued what mattered eternally for the glory of God. He said no to the desires of the flesh when they cried out. He touched people who were considered untouchable. He wept when he saw the devastation of sin. He engaged the "other" who was unlike him on his divine mission. You could probably think of 20 more if I gave you time.
- "Good living" is Christ-like living and that is what Peter has in mind here. We are to live out this good living TOGETHER so clearly and fully that it becomes a reputation. "He is a GOOD person, should become "Those are *good* people in that church." Even non-believers

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who don't know Jesus are supposed to be able to see our “good” living like Jesus as a church.

- Of course, says Peter, “pagans” as he calls them, unbelievers in the world won't always call what is truly good, “good.” If they did, the contrast with the not-good of the world would be too evident and painful.
- So, very often, while we are doing our good-living as a church the world will call the “good,” “bad” or even “evil.”
- So for example, Jesus would speak the truth to sinners in love. He would be honest about where that sin was leading and the painful death in life it would bring.
- Today, for example, if I truly love a homosexual by telling them the truth of what their sin is doing to them and to those around them, my love will be called evil by many people in the world. The same is true for speaking the truth in love about gender or divorce or abortion or crime or the state of the church and so on.
- There is not much I can do about people who turn reality and truth upside down. However, the time will come when God is involved and maybe even present, when their twisting of the truth and reality of what is good or bad will be all straightened out.
- When will this be? I'm not sure. Peter may have in mind the 2nd coming of Jesus and the judgment. Or, maybe he is thinking of times when God visits situations on earth with his power to straighten out what has been turned into twisted mess.
- What is certain, says Peter is that it will all come out—all the good lived like Jesus. All that good, even if it doesn't seem to bring glory to God now but rather gets called evil by the world—all that good will ultimately bring glory to God as it should.

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- Again, even though the context is about us living good for God's glory TOGETHER as a Living Temple, a royal priesthood, a holy NATION, a chosen PEOPLE, most of us will probably nearly automatically defer to thinking about how this happens in individual terms.
- We will begin to think of ways "I" can live "good" like Jesus in **MY** life. I can do this by myself, my way at work and school and play. Yes I can and I would never suggest I shouldn't want to personally live like Jesus in all those contexts.
- But, again, Peter has more in mind than our individual goodness or morality as a way of proclaiming God's praise into the darkness of the world. He has the whole Living Temple in mind.
- How will the Living Temple together say "**See God! Hear His truth!**" How will our holy priesthood get the word out that Jesus' church is connected to God? How will the world see His glory hearing His praises in the darkness?
- Yesterday, nearly a dozen young people came to my house to help me with a outdoor project I couldn't do on my own because of the weight involved. In others words they were together with me in my backyard loving me as Jesus commanded by serving me sacrificially.
- The family one side of us knows Jesus. The young family on the other side seems to know him but I don't yet know for sure since they moved in during COVID and we haven't had much contact. One family behind us, uphill looking down into our backyard is Rob and Shiney Abraham who we have worked with to do a couple of "Christmas around the World" Gospel presentations. I assume Rob and Shiney both know Jesus better than I do. The other house behind us looking down into our backyard recently changed owners. The new owners are young, have lots of unattended kids and dogs, a

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jeep parked in the backyard which I assume they levitated over their fence—I wasn't home when they did it—many motorcycles and many motorcycle riding friends in motorcycle club-looking gear.

- I paid attention as they watched this gaggle of kids work while looking down on them from their perch on their second-story deck. What did they see? Kids having fun working together. Kids not cussing when things went wrong. Maybe especially they saw kids joining in prayer as they finished their work.
- The good they saw was bigger than individual goodness and morality. Did the visible praying make it clear we were a Living Temple of God Together? Perhaps. I pray it did.
- Eventually we realized this sort of demonstration was what made Mission Survivor so powerful. It wasn't the projects completed or the fun. It was together being Jesus' Living Temple in a dark world.
- Some of these demonstrations are planned and others seem to present themselves as surprise gifts opportunity from God to us. I am glad we have learned to try to keep our eyes open for these.
- Please let me finish by reminding you of an unplanned opportunity like this that Jesus talked about in Scripture. It is found in Luke's Gospel chapter 10; verses 25-37.
- A religious expert in the Jewish Law asks Jesus how he can be earn the reward of eternal life—God's kind of life. This guy probably thinks he is already righteous and wants to be rewarded for it. Jesus doesn't get into how to be born again by grace through faith. He just says all you have to do is completely fulfill the Law and then shows the self-righteous man how he has already failed. Self-righteous religious people need to know they have failed before they can find out that they actually need grace. Anyway, I have a different purpose

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for the story then proving this guy was wrong. My purpose is asking what did Jesus say is right?—what did he say is the good?

• **READ Luke 10:25-37**

- There are many applications of the parable of the "Good Samaritan" ranging from the false conclusion that it is a discussion of the need to do good works to be born again to the conclusion that religious people like the priest and the Levite are generally hypocrites and even most of the Samaritans, whom the Jews shunned were good people.
- But, let's take Jesus application to the man's specific question in verse 29 because he hoped it would show him to be a perfectly self-righteous man.
- "Who is my neighbor?" Who is included in those I should love and serve when my path in life happens to cross theirs and they are in need of some "goodness?"
- Turned out the priest and Levite thought they had to say no to the man who needed them based on some higher value behind their decisions.
- The Samaritan said yes seeming to understand the special obligation of the Law to do goodness for whomever you can because God brings them across your path even if you and they are "other" to one another. Even if you would not naturally have an affinity for the person in need. These people are your neighbor says Jesus and Jesus says sacrificially loving them is the "good" neighbor policy.
- Sometimes kids who know me and may even love me do "good" for me and the world can see something different happening. The Living Temple display together can certainly work that way.

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- Other times there are rare opportunities that God puts on our path—an individual path like that of the Good Samaritan or maybe a collective path like the path of a church together.
- These can be paths we could never make on our own—miraculous paths where we discover “the other” —someone not like us—who needs “the good living” from us that brings glory to God in the darkness of the world.
- Sometimes it is just one person on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem that encounters the “**other**” who needs the “**good**” that will carry out the mission of “**See God! Hear His truth!**”
- Sometimes it is 12 teenagers praying in a backyard.
- Today, as a church we are not on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. As a church, what road are we on this very day by God’s direction? Can we see any “**others**” who might “need the **good**”—**others** maybe very unlike us that God put us on a path to encounter so that we can proclaim into this dark world—hey you!—I’m here to do the “good” so you can “**See God and Hear His truth!**” and join us in speaking his praises into this dark world.