

Live the Good Life

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[0 : 00] Good morning to turn back together to 1 Peter chapter 2 to that section that we read together. Quite a difficult section and one I do feel that we need to unpack and to look at and apply for ourselves as Christians in the 21st century.

And as those who believe in the word of God and its authority over our lives as a revelation of the character of Jesus Christ.

I wonder as we think back on the week that we've had together or apart in our lives, as we examine ourselves, I'm terrible for examining everything.

I'm examining my motives, I examine what I've done, what it's been like. Sometimes it's just too much and you kind of internally explode and then you don't examine yourself for a while.

But I think as people it's important for us and Jesus would like us to examine our lives as well and to see what our lives look like.

[1 : 11] Because if we believe in the foundations of the gospel and we've spent a lot of time, and I apologise to those who are just visiting today, but we have spent a lot of time as we've looked at 1 Peter looking at the foundations of our faith, haven't we?

The grace and the peace that we've received as believers in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore we believe with that foundation in our lives, our lives should be different. Our lives should reflect the foundation that we have.

You know the core belief system, the core spiritual relationship that we have will be reflected in the lives that we live. Isn't that right? Shouldn't that be the case?

Any building that is well founded will reflect that foundation. And so we recognise as well that in our lives we are looking for our lives corporately as a people, as a community of believers, but also individually we're looking for our lives to be taking shape. The bricks are being built, as it were.

The building has been fashioned and we're looking for it to be built both in a community-wise and individually to reflect our foundation, to reflect Jesus in our lives. That's what we believe. We believe that God is taking our lives and moulding them and shaping them by His grace to be like Him.

[2 : 42] Now that will mean all of our lives are individual and different because we're all unique and individual people. But it also means that we corporate strands to what we look like because we are like Jesus, our Savior.

And I think that's one of the reasons we gather together in worship and we gather together in city groups and we gather together as individuals and as a group together because we want an atmosphere in which to learn.

We want to come together and be equipped to be God-sense, to be equipped to serve. And that's one of the reasons we come together both in worship and to be taught from Scripture, to hear God's voice from Scripture.

And the atmosphere of that is important. If I'm a ranting and raving and dictatorial, distant leader, you'll not listen to the words.

You'll think, who is he and what is he on about? He doesn't care about my life. He isn't interested in what my struggles are. The elders are distant. They squeeze into that room up there and make all these decisions, but they couldn't care less about us.

[3 : 53] If there was that kind of atmosphere among us, both in terms of leadership to people, but also among us as people, then we would find it very difficult to be equipped and very difficult to learn.

Here we see Peter speaking through this letter to his people and he says, dear friends, I urge you. Dear friends, I urge you. See, that's the atmosphere in which he teaches through the Spirit to these

people.

He does so with love. He does so with friendship. He does so with equality with them. And he does so with passion. I urge you, you know, he cares. He cares about Christ and he cares that they learn from Christ.

And he cares because they are friends together. People are willing to listen and are willing to learn and to lead and to be led through Jesus Christ with this atmosphere.

And isn't it the case that so often in our churches, excuse me, and so often in our lives for many, there is a toxic atmosphere in church.

[5 : 06] There's a toxic atmosphere between Christians and within Christian communities and within leadership. There's no respect given or received. People take offense. People have closed minds.

There's a disconnect. There's a lording over people. So we give up. We walk away. We say we can't be bothered with this anymore. There's no sense of oneness. We don't come under Christ and we can't learn.

It's just being bruised and being beaten. The right atmosphere matters, doesn't it? As we learn about Jesus Christ and there's a great atmosphere here from Peter to the people, dear friends, I urge you.

And may it be that we have that same friendship and same willingness and ability to learn together. So he goes on and speaks about the kind of life that is being built as we submit to Jesus Christ. And if there's one word and it's a really dirty word, there's one word that would summarize this passage. It would be submission. And that's an unpopular word today and it's an uncomfortable word for us.

[6 : 20] And we think of all kinds of connotations when we think of submission. But the reality is that this passage is all about how as we submit to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, that that is reflected in the lives that we live. It changes our lives.

So if we are saying Jesus is my Lord and He's my God, then as we submit to Him and to that, therefore our lives are changed because of that, because of His grace, because of His love, because of His salvation.

Because He has gone to the cross on our behalf. Our whole lives are changed. And that's really the question that I want to ask myself and ask all of us today is Christ our Lord, and if He is, are our lives being changed to reflect His Lordship?

I ran up to my study when we were singing the last hymn there because I always forget to do this. I wrote, or I take a reference for a page of a book and then I leave the book in my study and it's most annoying.

And this is a book based on a brief commentary on 1 Peter by Warren Wearsby. And he's speaking about this difference that Jesus should make in our lives.

[7 : 43] And he says, in the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, New York to hear a presentation of the Christian message by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society.

After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs, among other things, the chief said, and this is the significant part, brother. He said, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit.

If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree as you can all read the book? And then he goes on to say, brother, we are told that you've been preaching to the white people in this place.

These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little longer and see what effect your preaching has on them.

If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said.

[8 : 53] So he was very sharp in his knowledge that the foundation of the gospel should change those who came under the sound of that and who came to faith in Jesus Christ.

And that's really what this section is about. He's saying coming to Christ has an effect on our lives and the foundation should change us. And he goes on to say it changes us from the inside out. And I really am focusing mainly this morning on verses 11 and 12. He says, dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul.

So the first kind of reflection of having a life that is submitted to Christ is that we have an internal, an ongoing internal battle to face.

We have to stop the invisible rot within our lives. Abstain from sinful desires, desires being that internal mechanisms within us that war against your soul.

[9 : 59] So it's interesting that what Peter is saying here is that we will face a battle as believers when Christ becomes our Lord. There's something happens. We find ourselves at one level at war with ourselves because there's an internal battle that we recognize the sinful desires in our hearts.

There's going to be an outward result of that, an outward reflection of that. The battle begins internally for us with Christ as our Lord.

D. L. Mudi is reputed to have said, I have more trouble with D. L. Mudi than with anyone else. That was the right attitude. He recognized there was an internal battle, a battle within his own soul, within his own desires that the Lordship of Christ awoke within him.

The great thing that we do is we want to battle with everyone else because it's easier. We want to point out everyone else's faults and mistakes because it's simple.

But Christ says that the first battle we face, the major battle we struggle with, is an internal battle with the sinful desires which war against our soul.

[11 : 17] In other words, we recalibrate our desires. Why do we need to do that? Because our desires have been tainted and bruised by sinful selfishness as we've rejected God.

We've created good. All our desires were good when we were created. But right from the beginning, that goodness was tainted and bruised and broken and twisted when we turned away from God and when humanity turned away from God.

So that what we are left with is appetites that rather than being used for God's glory and being used for God's grace and being used in God's way, are used to satisfy our own selfish desires without reference to God.

So whether it be food or drink or sex or whatever our internal appetites and desires are, ambitions, it is the use of these things without reference to God that we battle against when we become Christians.

Because when we become Christians, we see these desires renewed, that they are God's, that they are to be used within God's parameters, and that they are to be used for God's glory and with thankfulness to God as the giver of these things.

[12 : 42] Why would we bother with such internal struggle? Life's hard. Why do we have that internal struggle with these things? God just makes us to live and enjoy life? Absolutely. But to enjoy it with His Lordship and within His parameters as the good giver of these gifts.

We bother with it because our own selfishness reflects our spiritual antipathy towards God and towards His Lordship and towards His ability to heal us and to change our desires and to make our desires God-glorifying and right before Him.

Grace enables us to do that, and what Christ has done in taking away our sin and our selfishness and our bitterness is what redemption is all about.

This isn't really about the morality of our behaviour outwardly. It's about rebuilding our lives from the inside out. We can't change our own desires. We can't change our own desires to use God's good gifts for our own end and for our own pleasures without reference to Him.

We need Him to change our desires so that we can love Him and worship Him and serve Him. So we have this internal battle that we face on our knees in relationship with God, asking Him to renew and refresh and change our desires so that He is Lord.

[14 : 21] He comes into the picture of our lives. We submit to Christ because He is worthy of that, having gone to the cross for our redemption.

But then also we see and we recognise that we are to live the good life visibly as we are dealing with this internal battle and this internal work that we are dependent on God for and dependent on God worth with. We are to live the good life visibly.

Live such good lives among the pagans that though you accuse of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God in the day He vices us.

This isn't about moralism, about just being a good person, it's about reflecting an inner change and becoming Christ-like who is the author of all goodness and so that we reflect what He is like in our lives.

I was telling some folk that we were out with last night, 20, maybe 30 years ago, and I worked in Peterhead for a year that Christians in the oil service industry, the company I worked with, were never called Christians in that whole community.

[15 : 43] They were just called those who were good living. I don't know if that's common in different places as well, but they were just referred to as good living. If you were a Christian you were good living. Now sometimes I had negative connotations, sometimes I had positive connotations and there is an element of truth within that.

But it's not about being good and looking down at others who we are judgmental about, nor is it about being good in ourselves and the attitude that so many people have.

It's only good people in Invercommas that will go to church or instead in Christ. And I tell us about recognising that as sinners coming to Christ for salvation, recognising our own need and our own bleakness and our own sin, that we come to Christ and therefore seek to live good lives in His strength and with that internal change that He is allowed to happen.

We live because He is good, we live with grace, we live with compassion, with sacrifice, with moral strength, with dignity, with respect to others.

Sometimes suffering for that, forgiving, hospitable, all the graces that reflect Jesus and His character should be a reflection of how we live in a selfless, humble and Christ-centered way.

[17 : 08] And as we do so, we find that that has a positive effect on those around us, that those who don't believe come to the place where they can give God glory because they see that is a life that has been changed, a life that is attractive and good and Christ-centered, even though they may come from a position of unbelief, it brings glory to God, that your life and mine as we are serving Christ is what God uses to bring other people to faith.

Because they see Christ incarnate in us, they say, well that is, I like what is happening in their life, I like the change that has been made, I like the grace that they show and they live, even though there are struggles with faith and with belief.

And I want to know this Christ who is real to them, who has changed them, who has transformed them, that brings glory to Christ.

So we find as we are battling internally with desires that are self-centered and God-abandoning, as we deal with them by His grace, and as we find our desires for Christ internally, growing and developing, then we seek to live good lives, not goody-to-shoe lives, but just good lives, solid lives, sacrificial lives, loving lives, lives that people are attracted to because that is how we have been made, brings God glory, and it is how the church grows, because people see the reality of the Jesus that you serve.

Now there are a couple of situations here that it applies in, and there are very different situations to where we find ourselves today, but I think there are principles that we can take from them.

[19 : 07] The whole next section going on to chapter 3 speaks about the outworking of us being submissive to Jesus Christ. In our hearts, coming to Him for redemption, recognizing His Lordship and His worthiness of worship, we come to Him, submit to Him, and our desires we seek to be molded by Him.

We live a good life, and then we find that that submission to Christ, that servant spirit that we have for Christ Jesus, begins to work itself out in wider areas of our lives.

We don't like that whole idea of submission and of having that submissive spirit. You may be sitting here today saying, I, listen, I submit to no one. I submit to no one. That's my freedom, and that's my position.

But I think ultimately, if we don't submit to Christ, if we don't submit to God, we submit to everything, but God. We're submitting to our own mortality, to our own fallibility, to our own unbelief, or to the unbelief of the world around us. We're submitting to the knowledge of the world, to the knowledge of society.

We're submitting to others and how they think. We're just choosing not to submit to God and to His revelation of Himself. But how does it apply for us as Christians in these couple of situations?

[20 : 28] Well, one is about being a good citizen, and the other is about being a good employee. So we have the section 13 to 17, which talks about submitting yourself of the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men.

And it's a general realization that comes from Scripture that the rule of law in any society is this authority of any society.

Whatever structure that happens to be, and some structures are better than others, and we look to change some structures rather than maintain them over a period of time. But the rule of law and authority is something that comes under the Lordship of God, and it is given by God.

And as Christians, we are not to be anarchists at that level. That's simply really what Peter is saying here. We're to live under the law, and we're to be good citizens within that.

We're to take part in society, take part in politics. We're to change politics where we can and influence politics through the means, the democratic means that we have.

[21 : 33] And we are to submit to that law as good citizens. We are not primarily those who are as Christians anarchists. We might not agree with the philosophy and the thinking of the law, of the land in which we live, but it doesn't give us the right to break that law.

Unless it asks us to do something personally that is going to force us to break God's higher law in our lives.

But the reason for us being good citizens within society is because we recognise that our freedom and our reason for being is not enshrined in a political system or within a world order.

That the answer to our needs is not political and is not societal. However much society is part of the world in which we live. The revolution that we have undergone is a spiritual one and is not primarily a political one.

I'm not saying there's not political implications from belief and political implications from Christian thinking. Of course there are. But that we don't put our hope in any one political system.

[22 : 49] And we don't live our lives for the changing of a political system as if it's the answer. But we come under the authority of those who have been instituted among us and seek to respect everyone.

Love the brotherhood, fear God and honour the King. However that is reflected in the authority structures of the society in which we live. Good citizens.

But also good employees. The next section goes on from verse 18 to the end of the chapter or at least to chapter verse 21 to talk about slaves submitting to your masters.

Now this doesn't rest comfortably with us. This whole idea of slavery. We recognise it. And I'm sure the gospel roots that will be spoken of this evening will recognise that.

And that very often that is through the outworking of Christian principles that slavery has been abolished. But what we have here is a recognition of the order of the day.

[24 : 00] The order of the day in which Peter was writing his letters. The context was to Christians who were slaves.

That's what they were. Very often maybe not so much like the African slaves who came to America. But they were household slaves and the whole structure of the Roman Empire was built around that employment structure.

They certainly weren't free but there was about 60 million of them. And Peter wasn't advocating for them a revolution at this point. He was simply saying in the situation you find yourself as a slave or indeed as a master in these days.

You are to recognise your Christian responsibility to live and to act in a right way. This wasn't an ethical judgment on the system here at this point.

That was outworked in history and in time. If rebellion was encouraged here as it was later on there would most likely have been a horrendous bloodletting.

[25 : 14] But he is saying that in the situations in which you find yourselves then recognise a higher master, a higher authority. And now we can take that and apply it to our working relationships to being good employees and good employers as Christians.

That in other words all of our life comes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Whatever situation we find ourselves in. Now I know that some of you will have spent this week in bad situations in work where you have been ill treated or wrongly treated or treated unfairly.

And we are asked as Christians to respond in these situations recognising that that is sometimes how we will be asked to respond. We will be asked to respond in a Christ-like way.

We will be asked to respond sometimes by simply carrying on doing good and doing right. And that is tremendously difficult to do.

But we recognise also that for us our motivation and our life and our priority and our identity is not either in our work and our employment nor in our nationality or in our politics.

[26 : 35] However significant they all are. Our identity is in Christ and in His Lordship and our submission to that. Christ is to whom we give the glory.

Christ is the one that we live for. He is our example to this you were called because Christ suffered for you. We recognise that in this world we will suffer and struggle and battle and we are called to do that by living a good life in His name and for His glory.

To recognise that as He suffered unjustly so in many instances will we. And that as our authority we see and recognise that one day justice will be done because of who He is and because we are all accountable to Him.

Our life and our lives is primarily about righteousness. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness, for by His wounds you've been healed. So in all of our lives we ask the question what would Jesus do? How would He live? How would He respond? And we go to Him for His grace and for His help because He is our shepherd.

[28 : 02] He is the overseer of our soul. Now we all face many battles and we will face many battles into this week. Sometimes we face battles from the church, sometimes we face battles from the world in which we live.

But I would argue primarily we face a battle internally and internally with these desires that we seek to mould to God into His glory.

And we pray for that as we recognise like Dale Moodie, Moodie the greatest battle that we face is with ourselves.

We will find our hearts being changed and our attitudes and our motives and our desires being changed for God and for His glory. And the foundation do we have? And is that foundation Jesus Christ? Is it reflected in our life, in our attitudes, in our thinking, in the workplace, in society, in politics, in the arts, in whatever we are and whatever we do?

We see the foundation who moulds us and who changes us and who informs our thinking and our living. That is what we have to do. We have to be and we saw that from the beginning, thinking, Christians, seeking to bring Christ into every part of our lives.

[29 : 27] Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God, help us to live our lives for you. We find it really difficult sometimes and we ask for forgiveness when we are overwhelmed by wanting to take all your good gifts and all the beautiful things you give us and the life that we live.

We want to take that and we want to give you no acknowledgement. We want to take it, take it and hold it to ourselves and say, this is my right, this is my life.

And we forget so often our indebtedness to you for even the gift of life that we have and more so when we forget the spiritual life that we have been gifted through Jesus Christ.

We treat it as a common thing or as something that is valueless, cheap and we pray that you would help us to see more clearly by your spirit, to see the beauty of your character and of your redemption for us.

And we realize that while we were dead in our sins and separated from us, from you, that you sent Jesus to be the bridge, to be the one, the way, the truth and the life to give us a way back to God and to spiritual life and to the defeat of death.

[30 : 59] So we pray for these things and remind us as we gather in each Lord's day how much we need to be reminded of these things because the world in which we live will not remind us.

So give us open books as we read about Jesus, open hearts and change us and renew us by your grace and remind us that we are accountable to you as the great Lord and God draws to yourself today we pray as we worship and as we fellowship together in His name. Amen.