

Resist - 21/02/2016

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Beloved in The Lord,

The three most powerful words in the Bible are: "God is love". God is motivated by love and everything that He does, is in love, because He is love. Today is the second Sunday in Lent. That means that in five weeks we will be celebrating Easter, and Easter is the greatest expression of God's love.

Loving us so very much, God sacrificed His Son on the cross, to make it possible for us to be saved from sin, to be made righteous before God, and so be inheritors of eternal life in Heaven.

Jesus taught: ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."* John 3:16**

God so loved you and me, that He took the punishment that we deserved and placed it upon His sinless Son, so that we would not have to suffer. That is love. Because God is Just and Holy and Righteous, He could not simply ignore sin. He could not simply leave sin unpunished because that would not be Just. Loving us, Jesus took the punishment for our sin upon Himself. He substituted Himself in our place. He took our punishment, so that we would not have to be eternally lost.

When we believe in Jesus, then our sin debt is wiped out and our names are written in the Book of Life. When we are in Christ, we can be totally confident in the fact that our place in the Father's house is secure. Nothing can separate us from Him, from the love of God.

However, we still have a daily battle with sin. God is calling us to a holy and Righteous life. Our lives are to reflect His love and His glory. Our lives should honour Him in word and in deed. - always, in all things.

That is not easy, because our fallen nature always leans toward sin. Our fallen nature tries to take over. Not only that, we have an active, deceitful and powerful enemy, who relentlessly tries to derail us. If we are truly in Christ, he cannot separate us from Him, but he can cause us to stumble and ruin our testimony, ruin our witness, and make us ineffective for God's Kingdom. This is what we need to be alert to all the time.

Peter writes: ***"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."⁹ But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.¹¹ To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1.Pet.5:8-11)***

So, we are to be of sober spirit and alert all the time. What we need to understand is that Satan can not force us to sin. We cannot use the excuse: “the Devil made me do it.” Sin is always our decision. The Devil tempts us, but he cannot force us. He plants the seed, puts the thought in our minds, but the decision to act upon it is solely ours.

If, when tempted, we begin to entertain the thought, then we are on the road to sin. What we need to be alert to, as well, is that Satan often disguises temptation. We do not immediately see the problem, and don’t think through the consequences. Satan is a master at disguising sin and presenting it in a nice juicy package. He often uses the tactic that worked so well on Eve, he causes us to doubt God’s Word. He entices us to go beyond what God allows, or to give in to some lust, without spelling out the terrible consequences.

At home, I have for a number of years now, had a battle with pigeons. Outside, at the back of our house we have an awning that covers the BBQ and outdoor entertainment area. The awning is attached to the house, and all along the back of the house there is a ledge under the gutter, that is divided into 50cm wide rectangles. A few years ago a pigeon couple decided that one of these alcoves would be a good place to build a nest. I noticed what was going on, and didn’t think too much about it. With time, other couples saw that it was a good spot, and they too began to build nests. That was not something I was happy about as they make a big mess, and also attract all sorts of pesky insects. I decided to evict them, and I placed some wire mesh over the alcove. I then discovered that pigeons are very persistent. They simply set up in the next alcove. I tried scaring them off, and that was not successful, so in the end I had to put mesh over every single alcove. For a number of weeks afterwards, from time to time I saw the pigeons flying back to see if there was not some spot I had left open for them. I now check every few days to make sure my mesh is secure.

Satan and his demons are much like these pigeons. They are persistent and relentless in their attempts to nest in our mind. They are constantly looking to see if we have not left open a door or avenue for them to come in. That is why we are to be alert at all times. We need to be staying close to Jesus all the time.

This is where our text today gives us hope and encouragement. We have a helper. We do not have a God who is distant, but a God who is very near. We have a God who understands our battle, because Jesus, when in the flesh of man, was tempted just like us, but He never sinned. Let us read our text again:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Two weeks ago we saw that we are to cling tightly to God, and to never let go. We should not let go of His hand even for a moment. We do not need to try to resist temptation and fight sin on our own, in our own strength. We have a Helper, we have support, we have Jesus. He understands us, and He helps us if and when we ask. He shows us from His own life how we are to fight Satan. When He was tempted, He replied to every temptation by

quoting Scripture: "It is written". Jesus used God's Word, as a sword and defence. He never entered into a debate with the Devil and neither should we. He always said: "It is written...."

God's Word is powerful and when we proclaim it in faith the Devil runs. We read in James: ***"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."*** (James 4:7-8)

Very clearly stated. When we stand firm and resist the Devil, He must flee. We must do the resisting. Had I not stood up to the pigeons and left them, they would have eventually taken over the whole of the back wall ledge.

This verse contains two very powerful promises. The first one is that if we resist the Devil, He will flee, and secondly if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. .

In order to live victoriously we need to be resolved in our hearts that we want to honour God, that we want to live a life that glorifies His name. That we want to live in accordance with His will.

When we make this resolve, we must be ready to fight, because the Devil will challenge us, our faith will be tested. Satan doesn't like it when people glorify God.

Please understand that to live a life that is resolved in it's intention to glorify God is the best life possible. We have this wonderful promise that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. As we considered recently, the best place to be is abiding in the shadow of God's wings, near to Him.

This year during Lent, may we make two resolutions: We will resist the Devil and we will draw near to God.

Many people fast during Lent, that is they deny themselves food, or alcohol, or something else that they regularly enjoy. Fasting is a great way of disciplining your body and conditioning yourself not to be driven by your flesh and it's many desires.

As well as fasting, I would encourage all of us to actually do more than we normally do. That is do more reading of the Bible, more praying, more study of God's Word, spend more time in worship. As we get more into God's Word, we will be better equipped to resist the Devil and say: "It is written!"

The more we consciously draw near to God, the closer we will be, because He will draw near to us. That is His desire.

We need to humble ourselves before Him everyday and to be in His presence and we will experience blessings beyond measure.

We began by saying God is love and on this truth we end.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.