

War and Peace

1 Peter 2:11-12

April 12, 2015
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How many of you have read *War and Peace*? Yeah, neither have I. It is a book that if you just see somebody reading it, you are impressed. *War and Peace*. It's an interesting title. It's not *War Then Peace*, or *War Instead of Peace*, or *War Without Peace*, but *War and Peace*. We Christians get that. To be a Christian is to struggle with an internal war. It is to battle with desires that corrupt us and remind us of our old way of life. We also strive for external peace. We desire to live out the gospel in ways that reflect the joy, goodness, beauty, and peace we have received from God through Christ. Internally, Iwo Jima; externally, Beethoven's fifth.

Peter has just written a glorious few verses about the privilege of the church to proclaim the excellencies of God to the world (Verse 9) Now, war and peace.

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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)

Verses 11-12 are the turning point of the whole letter. He essentially unpacks verse 9 with practical application. What does it look like for a local church to declare the goodness of God in its context? In its Jerusalem? Verse 11 is the War. Verse 12 is the peace.

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles..." (Verse 11) There is the language from which we get the whole series title, *Exiles*. Sojourner and exile are basically synonyms. Both of them mean someone who is living somewhere they don't belong. Somewhere they don't have citizenship. It's not their home. The home of their heart is somewhere else. Drive through neighborhoods during football season and you'll see people pronouncing they are sojourners and exiles. They are living in Indiana but during football season the flags waving outside their house are for Ohio State or Alabama. That is unacceptable unless it is an Iowa Hawkeye flag. When you see that, you probably could go to the door and say, *You're not from around here, are you?* Nine times out of ten, their flag is from their state of origin. That's where their heart is.

As Christians, we are exiles and sojourners in the sense that we live in this world, we do business in this world, and we make friends and do life in this world, but our sense of belonging is not here. Our spiritual citizenship, our hearts, are with God and his kingdom. We live here. But there are flags waving in our hearts for the kingdom of God and not the kingdom of man. This is the point of Hebrews 11, the chapter of faith, with great heroes of the faith who lived here but their hearts looked forward to the enduring city of God and life eternal with him. What flags are flying in your heart? Where do you belong?

Okay, what does that look like? How do we live in this world as citizens of another? Peter urges us to go to war, *"to abstain from the passions of the flesh."* (Verse 11)

WAR

What are the passions of the flesh? Passion is a good word. We should be passionate people. The passions of the flesh are different. These are the unbridled desires of the human nature. This is man's morality unchecked by law or conscience or consequence. Where do these illicit desires come from? Jesus located the source as the fallen and broken human heart: *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."* (Matthew 15:19)

How did such evil take residence in our hearts? When Adam and Eve sinned, we all died spiritually with them. An enemy took up residence in our hearts. Every human being who has ever lived, other than Christ, has this enemy within them. We all have it right now, lurking quietly, ready to take over at any moment should our mind and will allow it.

So the story of human history is not basically good people doing occasional bad things but basically bad people occasionally doing good things. Sometimes it's often, as we retain a conscience and still bear God's image. But our hearts are depraved and spiritually bankrupt. Our default setting is pride and self-love. As Ted Koppel once said, "Anyone who denies the depravity of man never had a 2-year-old."

Our enemy → me (the old one)

In any war, how do you identify your enemy? It's generally easy. They are the ones shooting at you. They are the ones trying to destroy you. Look how Peter describes these treacherous desires: *"which wage war against your soul."* (Verse 11) The Greek word for war is a military one. Think of a famous battle like WW II's Iwo Jima where there is carnage all around. The enemy is hell-bent on doing anything to kill you. You've probably seen enough war movies to know what soldiers do when the bullets are flying. They crouch. They look for cover. They fight back.

Imagine a guy on D-day walking across the beach of Normandy apparently oblivious that a battle is taking place. How long does he last? To win a war, you first have to realize that you are in one.

Peter says there is an internal war going on in the heart of the Christian. On one side is the new person Jesus is creating us to be. This revolution is led by the Holy Spirit. This side is the side of truth. Joy. Obedience. Pure heart. On the other side are the remnants of the old regime. This enemy is determined to obstruct, distract, and destroy anything glorious or good God is doing. Peter calls it a war. Can you imagine being in a war and not knowing it? How many Christians are there in this war like the guy looking for shells on Normandy beach on the morning of June 6, 1944? Be honest. Are you aware that you are in a war and the battleground is your soul? Listen to other Scriptures.

- *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* (Romans 8:13)
- *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."* (Galatians 5:16-17)

How does this enemy wage his war? The battlefield is the mind and the heart. The affections. The desires that rule us. It is often difficult to perceive the enemy in there. These

desires of the flesh fit perfectly with the value set of the world around us. Because of this they seem normal and even acceptable. It is only Christians who have this struggle at all.

One way we spot the enemy in us is when we see the effects in our lives or in the lives of others.

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
(Galatians 5:19–21)

When you see these in yourself or others, the enemy has been sighted. One sermon can't hit everything on this so let's just stick with Peter's strategy. *Abstain*. The word is a geographical one. "Be far from." If the enemy wants you to go east, go west.

- *"Flee...youthful lusts."* (2 Timothy 2:22 KJV)
- *"Make no provision for the flesh."* (Romans 13:14 ESV)
- *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."* (Galatians 5:16)

My goal in this message is to make you aware of the war. It's kind of like when 9/11 woke America up to the fact that there are people who hate us. This passage should alarm us and wake us up to the reality of a real enemy living with us 24/7 whose whole goal is to destroy us.

Too often we Christians get caught in a sin or its consequences and you hear people say, "I didn't see it coming. I didn't think someone like me could do something like that. That's not the real me." Actually, it is. It's the real us. Christian, you are in a war. The question is, *are you fighting? Are you fleeing? Are you abstaining from the very desires that, if left unchecked, will lead us to sin and all its destructive consequences?*

PEACE

The stakes are high for our personal lives. Our spiritual lives. Our happiness. But that is not Peter's primary concern here. He is concerned about the local church's witness and testimony in the community. Remember, the secular world is hostile to Christian truth. We live as exiles here. What should we do? *"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)

Verse 11 flows into verse 12. They are one thought in Peter's mind. Something not to do: abstain from the illicit desires. Something to do: live honorably before a watching world. We tend to think of morality and virtue as a private matter, as something we do behind closed doors so as not to seem holier than thou. Peter has the opposite perspective for the church. See it in the first phrase, *"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable."* Why does he use the term *Gentiles* here? It's not to make an ethnic distinction. He means Gentiles in the spiritual sense. Unbelievers. The unbelieving world and people around us. Peter says that your conduct, your lives, should have a certain quality to them. The ESV translates it "honorable." It is the Greek word for good in the sense of inherently good or beautiful; not in the artistic sense, but in the moral and spiritual sense.

When real and authentic Christianity shows up, the secular culture can't help but notice. Real Christianity shows itself in kindness, generosity, justice, sacrificial love—virtues that

are rare in the world. This is not a call to perfection. The gospel reminds us that we need grace every day. But it is a call to a holy life marked by love.

Last night I was doing a final edit on this at a restaurant and the loud table next to me was telling stories of Christians going to Sunday lunch after church and leaving loose change and tracts. They weren't impressed. Peter assumes Christians will live faithfully as Christians and that lifestyle will create a holy curiosity.

"So that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." (Verse 12) This sounds like double-speak. Live righteous lives and they will accuse you of doing evil? In honor of the Masters golf tournament, here's a quick golf illustration. There is a true story from years ago involving a Pro-Am tournament. Billy Graham was playing as an amateur in the event. It just so happened that one of the more notorious bad-boy golfers on tour was matched to play with Billy Graham. A friend of the golfer thought this humorous and kidded with the PGA golfer about it. After the round, the friend saw the PGA player on the practice tee hitting balls in a furious anger. So he rushed out and asked him, "What did Billy Graham say that made you so mad?" The golfer replied, "He didn't say anything!" (R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*)

How many of us deal with negativity from family or coworkers simply because we are Christians? A few weeks ago we looked at verse 9 that Jesus is the stumbling stone for those who do not believe. I had a family come up to me after that sermon in tears. They are just about to leave for the mission field to minister in a community that does not like Christians at all. With tears they said, we have to remember that it is not us they are rejecting; it's the stone that is being rejected.

The only perfect human being who has ever lived was accused of being born illegitimately, of plotting to overthrow Rome and be king, of demon possession, blasphemy, and mental derangement. The early Christians were viewed with suspicion and hostility because they didn't conform to the lifestyle of the people around them (See Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude, Vol. 37*, p. 122).

If I may pull a thought from recent headlines, to believe marriage is between a man and a woman is increasingly portrayed as pure hatred and bigotry. The world accuses us of evil in their eyes. But in all this, we have a spiritual ace in the hole. What is it? Go back to verse 12, *"so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God."* The church in exile should exhibit a kind of life that is so different morally and so different socially (love for others), that the world becomes like that PGA golfer—exasperated and perplexed, but silenced because of our example of love.

"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 5:16) The effect of "light" (Jesus) and "good deeds" (Peter) is evangelistic. Both verses culminate in the unbeliever worshiping God. Peter adds the wrinkle "on the day of visitation." I think that refers to the return of Christ or final judgment. In the end, the PGA golfer who has a close-up view of Billy Graham may rethink his prejudice and hopefully believe in the saving message of Jesus which Billy Graham represents.

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives." (1 Peter 3:1) I am going to give an illustration of this and I am telling you right now, I am going to tell it again in a few weeks when we do that passage. Many years ago, when I first came to Bethel, I got a call that an elderly woman, we will call her Jan, that her husband was dying in the

hospital and she asked if I would go see him. I had never met him. I understood that he was a tough sort of guy with no interest in Christianity. The family was praying as they viewed this as kind of a last chance for him to believe. I went to the hospital and came into the room. He husband was on the bed with tubes everywhere. Jan was on the other side, holding his hand and slowly rubbing it. I sat down next to him. I sensed he wasn't really too interested in me being there but I commenced with some small talk. Very abruptly he said, "Pastor, if you have something to say, you say it, cause I've got to pee." There was a disdain for me in his voice that honestly ticked me off. I rose from my chair and got right in his face and I said, "Well then, let me get right to it." I said, "You're about to die. Without Jesus you are going to hell. You can deny it all you want but you can't deny it in your wife."

He looked like he might take a swing at me but the moment I pointed to his wife, his whole face changed. He looked over at her. There she is holding his hand. He said, "Yep, you're right. She's one fine cookie." Think of Jan all those years, taking the kids to church; reading the Bible to them, with no spiritual support whatsoever from her husband. All the faithful wife responsibilities she did for him. All her faithfulness. Year after year.

The effect? At the end of his life, literally on his death bed, he couldn't speak evil of Christianity because he had seen it all those years in his wife.

Let's let Peter challenge us here. *Does my life make the case for Jesus and the gospel? Would an unbeliever be drawn to consider becoming a Christian himself?*

Live beautiful lives in this hostile world. Even those who hate you will in their hearts wonder if maybe there is something to it. That wondering may open their hearts to think, *If Jesus did it in his life or her life, maybe he will do it mine.*

"Yep, she's one fine cookie."

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