

2B / Parish Retreat 2018: Following Jesus in a World that Doesn't

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[0 : 00] I'm answering two questions tonight from the text. The first question is, what is God's plan? And his plan, now we know, is to build a home. And the second question is, how do we participate?

How do we participate in God's plan? And the answer is given at the end of verse 5. We are being built up as a spiritual house.

Why? To be a holy priesthood. To offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We are a church with a call.

And our mission, from verse 5, is to become God's temple, his home. And within that temple, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God as his holy priesthood. Verse 9 elaborates on that.

Our vocation is, quote, Our mission, as God's temple, is to share God's mighty works.

[1 : 02] To proclaim the beauty and the goodness and the grace of God revealed in Christ. With the people we encounter. This is our spiritual sacrifice made to God.

Our vocation is to be formed into a house that emits this delicious, inescapable aroma of Christ. That's why God blesses us.

So that we would be a blessing. By inviting others to come to him. And how do we do that in Vancouver? How do we proclaim the mighty works of God in a culture that is proudly anti-God? How do we share about the goodness of God in a city that has decided that God is not good? How do we go on mission to share good news when people think God's message is bad news? Peter gives us two directives. Two strategies. To offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim God's goodness to a world that does not want to listen.

[2 : 07] And interestingly, neither of Peter's instructions involve talking. If you're the kind of person who is just terrified of being asked about your faith in the break room or at a friend in a coffee shop or by your kids or something.

Both of Peter's instructions don't involve speaking. So there you go. We can proclaim God's praises without words. Peter commands us to proclaim God's goodness without words.

But instead by how we live. By our actions. Our faith is revealed. One scholar has called this lifestyle evangelism. I really like that.

Lifestyle evangelism. And here they are. Peter's two instructions on how to be a holy people in secular society. It's by firstly omitting from certain cultural norms.

And secondly, by committing countercultural good deeds. The two instructions are omission and commission. Abstaining and engaging. Two sides of lifestyle evangelism.

[3 : 15] And I'm going to spend almost all my time on the first one. So if you think, oh my goodness, there's a second point. The first one is 90%. Just stay with me. First directive is in verse 11.

Dear friends. I urge you. As foreigners and exiles. To abstain from sinful desires. Which wage war against your soul.

The first strategy we're given to proclaim the goodness of God. Is to abstain from sin. By resisting sinful temptation and desire. By omitting selfish, sinful indulgence from our lives.

Peter instructs us to bless the world and glorify God. From abstaining from sinful cultural norms. This is the first kind of spiritual sacrifice we're called to. We, like Peter and his readers, live in a culture.

That teaches us to reach for our wildest dreams. To get whatever we want. However we can. To feed every desire and every craving.

[4 : 21] To find our purpose in passion or pleasure and possessions. We live in a society of unimaginable selfishness. And consumption.

And into this context. And into this context. Of self-debasement. And this all-access. All-you-can-eat buffet of sinful extravagance.

Peter tells us to share God's goodness. With the secular culture. By first abstaining. From the sinful desires. That our culture is infatuated with.

And invites us to revel in. Abstain from sinful indulgence. Abstain from evil desires. Abstain from selfish sin. Omit them from your life.

And you will be a powerful witness. To the goodness of God. In the context of a sinful anything-goes society. Perhaps the strongest way we can proclaim God's goodness.

[5 : 20] Is through abstaining from the sin. All around us. Actions often speak louder than words. So let your actions of self-restraint. Of abstaining from sinful indulgence.

Loudly declare your allegiance to Christ. And the sufficiency of his gospel. People in our world notice what we do not do. As much as they notice what we do.

Omission. Abstaining. Is a very powerful. And perhaps underused tool. For evangelism. And I think in Vancouver today. Our sexuality is perhaps our greatest opportunity to abstain.

In order to witness to God's goodness. If you can abstain from any sexual expression that is outside of a traditional biblical marriage. Because you follow Jesus and you love him.

The world will notice. Without you even saying a word. I was talking to a Christian man a couple months ago. Who used to identify as being gay.

[6 : 23] He came out. From a Christian home. Mennonite background. But today. He is married. To a woman. And he believes in a traditional biblical view of sexuality.

And I said to him what I said to you this morning. I said perhaps my greatest apologetic struggle right now. Is how to claim the gospel is good news of great joy for gay people. And I said to you this morning.

Our gospel to that community seems so prohibitive. So demanding. So restrictive. So unloving. How can we call it good news.

If our gospel demands a gay person embrace a life of celibacy. Of singleness. Of loneliness. In order to follow Jesus. And this man who still struggles with same sex attraction.

Told me his simple answer. He said. Having Jesus in my life. Knowing Jesus. Coming to him.

[7 : 23] Is better than anything. This world can offer me. It is good news. Because knowing God through Christ. Is infinitely better. Than anything a gay life could give me.

What a powerful witness to the goodness of God. That is lifestyle evangelism. Abstaining from sinful desires.

To offer spiritual sacrifices. While proclaiming the excellencies of God. With your life. So for your own good. And for God's glory.

Abstain from sinful desires. And the world around you. Will be evangelized. By your lifestyle. Now I think I need to say.

That if you have an addiction of any kind. Maybe you've never thought of it as an addiction. But there's some sinful desire. That you can't shake from your life. You know as well as I do. That the least helpful thing.

[8 : 20] Another person. Especially a preacher. Can say is. Abstain. Stop doing it. I'm addicted to this. Oh okay stop. Stop. Have you tried that? You can't stop.

You've lost control. That's why it's an addiction. So if you're struggling today. To abstain from sinful desires. Whatever they may be. Let me tell you.

There is hope. And there is help. There is hope. Because you are not alone. All of us sin. And fall short.

Of the glory of God. Every person around you. Struggles. To abstain from sinful desire. We are all addicted. To different sinful desires.

We're in this together. We don't need to put on our Sunday church face. That we're holy. And we've got it all together. Because we don't. So let's just be honest with each other. There is hope.

[9 : 21] Because whatever your sin is. God's grace. Is greater. At the very beginning of 1st Peter. We're told that God the Holy Spirit.

Is doing a work of sanctification in you. He is at work. Even now. To make you like Jesus. Don't doubt his power. Jesus came to set the prisoners free.

God is working to free you from your sin. Even if you feel powerless against him. If you feel enslaved to a particular sin.

You know. Anger. Or immorality. Or envy. Or whatever it is. You can't simply decide tonight. To abstain. From the sinful desires. And be perfect.

Your self-will. Is not strong enough. You need help. So in order to succeed in abstaining. You need a loving community around you.

[10:19] Supporting you. Encouraging you. As an example. The most successful abstaining ministry in history. Is called Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is a group of strangers. Who gather together in unity. In solidarity. In support. In love. To encourage one another. In abstaining.

From sinful. Desire. AA is run. Three times at the building. Where my church meets. Literally hundreds of people. Come every week. For AA. And Narcotics Anonymous.

And they have another one too. It's amazing. Hundreds more people. Come to these ministries.

Than come to church services. In our building. It's hugely successful. If you've ever been to AA.

It's a steps program. There's 12 steps. And the first three steps are these. Listen to how good this is. So if you suffer from an addiction to a sinful desire. Listen to these first three steps. That the best abstaining ministry in history dictates.

[11:19] One. We admit we are powerless. Over our addiction. Our lives have become unmanageable. Confession.

Step two. We come to believe that only a power greater than ourselves. Can restore us.

Supplication. Three. We make a decision to turn our will.

And our lives. Over to the care of God. Repentance. Faith. That's so good. Isn't it? Go look up for 12 steps of AA.

But notice. AA's whole program. The whole ministry. Is built upon the realization. That no one can simply abstain on their own. It won't work.

You can't do AA alone from home. Online. It doesn't work. You can't abstain from your sinful desires. On your own strength. Or willpower.

[12:22] This is why God's given us the church. So if you're stuck in a sinful desire. What would it look like. To reach out and seek help. I know that is a terrifying prospect.

But perhaps that could free you. From the sin. Which is so easily entangling your life. And keeping you from Christ. This weekend.

This retreat. Provides a really unique opportunity. To do just that. We have space. And we have the church. We can actually do this. Here. What would it look like.

To reach out to a friend. That you can trust. Who you know. Who will support you. Who will walk with you. As you try to abstain. From a sinful desire.

Which is at war with your soul. And if this weekend. Someone reaches out to you. Needing help. Please resemble Christ.

[13:22] In showing not judgment. But love. And encouragement. And as a footnote. If you struggle.

With a sexual sin. With sexual brokenness. With sexual temptation. Or the victim of abuse. The best ministry. I have ever heard of. Is called Journey Canada. Used to be called Living Waters.

They're starting a six week course. In October. Look it up. Sign up. Go with a friend. Go for a friend. There is hope. And there is help.

Abstain. And your life. Will proudly proclaim. Loudly proclaim. Probably. That the sinful desires. Do not define you. And your spiritual sacrifice.

Will display. The mighty work of God. Who has delivered you. From darkness. Into his glorious light. That's the first strategy. To participate. In God's plan. Abstain.

[14:21] Second strategy. In one minute. Is in verse 12. I like the NIV. Live such good lives. Among the pagans. Among non-Christians. That although they accuse you.

Of doing wrong. They may see your good deeds. And glorify God. On the day. He visits us. So the second strategy.

Of lifestyle evangelism. Very quickly. Engage. In goodness. This is where that quote. We heard this morning. Is so helpful. About when you abstain from something. You need to fill up with something else.

