

Title: Leaving the Past in the Past
Date: November 11, 2018
Subject: Christ's suffering leads us to close the door on the past
Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1-6

Michael Buble is known for his smooth voice and renditions of pop rock, easy listening and vocal jazz styles. He's won numerous Grammys, People's Choice and other music awards. Then, minutes before he was scheduled to perform on a British TV talk show, he found out that his 3 year old son was diagnosed with liver cancer. He and his wife put their careers on hold in order to devote all their time and attention to helping their son get well. He was treated and is in remission. Buble has talked openly about the difficulties of watching their little boy go through treatment. Many times he wished that he'd been the one to have cancer instead of his son. He and his wife often felt like they were merely surviving. The ordeal opened his eyes to his priorities. He stopped touring and desired to spend time with his family. For a while he talked about turning his back on the music industry and walking away. He was done with chasing ticket sales, critics' responses, people's perception of him, chart placement and success. Now with the good news of his son's remission, he decided continue to make music, but it's with a different mindset.

Buble's change is an illustration of the change that takes place in the life of the person who has placed their trust in Christ. Their experience with Christ leads to a change of thinking and behavior.

READ 1 Peter 4:1-6

I. Motivations to live holy lives

A. Christ's suffering inspires us v. 1

Repetition is good. The paragraph reminds us Christ suffered in his body. His suffering was for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. He was well aware that suffering happens in life but also knew the specific suffering he would go through, that of the cross. In undergoing suffering, he didn't commit sin. He didn't act or speak deceitfully. He didn't retaliate. He made no threats. He entrusted himself to the father. He served others and not himself.

Christ is done with sin. This doesn't mean he'd previously sinned and was quitting sinning. Rather, by his suffering, he dealt the death blow to sin. He's done with it. There's nothing more he needs to offer.

Because of what the Lord Jesus has done, we are to arm ourselves. The military term means to get ready for battle. In a sense, all military training is preparing for battle – the marching, the digging of ditches and then the filling of the same ditch only to be ordered to dig it again, the obstacle courses, the making of bunks, the polishing of boots. All of it serves to instill discipline, obedience and more.

However, there's a time when soldiers really get prepared for battle. It's no longer a drill. They put on their armor, load their weapons. They're locked and loaded because the fight is coming to them in the next moment.

Jesus told us that we'd be in a battle. "Remember what I told you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33).

The truth is the moment a person places their trust in Jesus Christ, they're in the battle. There really isn't any prep time where the enemy will leave us alone so we can practice and train. It's kind of the old Navy way of teaching a person who doesn't know how to swim to swim. Throw them into the pool. Believers are thrown in the pool from the get go.

There are times when the battle shifts into high gear as in when we suffer. To be ready for battle we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude or way of thinking as Jesus. Bruce Wilkerson, "Having Christ on your mind is the most important weapon you can wield in the battle for the mind." The way a person thinks leads to the attitude a person expresses. Thinking the way Christ does and thinking about him allows us to copy his attitudes and actions.

During WWII two English soldiers had the duty of directing airplanes going to and returning from their bombing missions. It wasn't like today where controllers operate from towers. They were on the ground next to the runways. The weather was cold and damp and the airfield was a muddy mess. One soldier grumbled and complained while the other whistled while he worked. The sad-sack asked his buddy how he could be cheerful amid the mud, cold and noise. "I discovered long ago when I found myself in a situation that I didn't like but couldn't change, I'd adjust my attitude to fit the situation." He could have said to conquer the situation.

Attitude makes the difference. The way we think makes the difference in our attitude. Christ's suffering for our sin should motivate us to holy living.

B. Christ's return inspires us vv. 5, 6

There are two major aspects to Christ's return – the rewarding of his followers and the judgment of those who choose not to place their trust in him to deliver them from their sins. The focus is on the later. Unbelievers will be held accountable by God for their attitudes and actions toward his children. It may seem like they're ahead of the game while here on earth, while they pass judgment on Christ-followers. However, the one who judges all people, the living and the dead, is waiting for them.

The judgement by pagans on earth is flawed. It's temporary as it's only operative in this temporal existence. They judge believers by their ungodly standards. The good news is that it can only impact the physical nature not the spiritual connection with God. Though they may inflict suffering, persecution and even death on believers, they have no real power. They're unable to affect the soul. Those believers who died may have been judged by the unbelievers while on earth but they're the ones who're living with God in heaven.

Verse 6 explains the reason for the Gospel being preached was to alert people that God's judgment is rapidly approaching. The Heavenly Father will hold all people accountable for the way they responded to his Son. This is the motivation behind evangelism and missions – provide the opportunity to be prepared for what's coming so they can be on the right side in the future.

The story is told of a Midwestern farmer who had a strong contempt for “religious” things. As he plowed his field on Sunday morning, he'd shake his fist at the church people who passed by on their way to worship. October came and the farmer had his finest crop ever—the best in the entire county. He wrote a letter to the editor for the paper belittling Christians for their faith in God. Near the end he wrote, “Faith in God must not mean much if someone like me can prosper.” The Christians placed an ad in the next edition. It read simply, “God doesn't always settle His accounts in October.” Christ's return is to inspire us to live holy lives.

II. Ways holiness is cultivated

A. Separation from sin vv. 2 - 3

Christ died for our sins. As a result, believers are positionally dead to sin. We need to keep on counting that fact as true when we face temptation.

Financial experts remind us that we should keep receipts long term as proof that we've paid for something. Maybe not for Taco Bell or McDonalds. But certainly when the mortgage is paid or student loans or car payment. Those records are important documents. The transaction of Christ's payment on the cross for our sins is our cancelled receipt that we don't have to keep paying on the account. Christ paid the debt we owed for our sin. We've experienced his forgiveness.

Our intent is to live according to God's will. We are to turn our backs on the evil human desires of the earthly life. We're to say “good-bye, adios, sayonara, ta-ta, see you later alligator” to the past sinful lifestyle. Those things aren't options for us.

Suppose a woman's husband is killed while trying to save her from a rapist infected with AIDS, Ebola and the bubonic plague. What would you think, if after the husband's funeral, the woman contacts the rapist and says, “Let's meet at a motel.” It'd be patently absurd. Her husband died to rescue her from what would destroy her. Christ gave Himself to rescue us from the destruction of sin. Why go back to live in it?

Verse 3 enumerates some of the things with which we're to be done. They're a sample of the sins that seek to control and destroy us. Debauchery: all types of evil without moral restraint, implying a total lack of self-control, a determined violation, especially in the sexual area. Lust: any type of intense desires for something or someone that fulfills the natural tendency towards evil things, including but not limited to sexual immorality. Drunkenness: intoxicated with wine. Orgies: feasts given to sexual immorality. Carousing: “drinking parties.” Detestable idolatry: “the disgusting worship of idols” (IEV), “sacrilegiously worshiping false gods” (NJB). These sins were elements of pagan worship practices which appealed to the sin nature of people.

People can't think they're in the clear because there aren't pagan temples around where people engage in this kind of “worship.” The same sins are evident in people's private and public lifestyles. They may never

think of getting involved in these in a full blown way but figure they can nibble at the edges, thinking they won't get trapped or hooked. They think they're in control when they've already given over control to the sin. There are more sins of the past lifestyle we're to avoid and not allow to linger in our lives as we follow Christ (Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5, and Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We shouldn't look back to the past lifestyle for its so-called "fun."

As Scripture says, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness" (Romans 6:18,19). "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11-12)

The ermine lives in the forests of northern Europe. Hunters capitalize on its instinctive drive to protect its snow-white fur from becoming soiled. Instead of setting mechanical traps, they find the ermine's home in a rocky hillside or a hollow tree and smear the entrance and the interior with tar. When the hunters' dogs start the chase, the ermine races toward its home. But it won't enter if it means dirtying its fur, not even to save its life. Instead it will face the yelping dogs until the hunters capture it. For the ermine, purity is dearer than life.

Thinking that "just a little" won't harm is wrong thinking. It begins to lower our inhibitions. The threshold has been lowered and the next step is easier. Don't look at the website with suggestive ads or material. Don't turn the TV to the program.....Don't allow the thought to linger in our minds.

John Piper, "Arm yourself with this thought: any amount of past sinning is enough. If you sinned a little before you were converted, it's enough. If you sinned a lot and for many years before your conversion, it's enough. You can never sin so little that you could say, "I need some more time to sin." How many people say, "I know I need to get right with God and make a break with sin. But just a little more time. A little more time with sin." Peter says, arm yourself with this thought: the time you've spent sinning is sufficient. Make the break; choose the will of God. And suffer for it if you must" (desiringgod.org/messages/arming-yourself-with-the-purpose-to-suffer).

Being separate from sins can lead to suffering.

B. Suffering v. 4

Christ followers in Peter's day were misunderstood and attacked because their lives differed from that of the pagans. They no longer engaged in the same evil human desires. They didn't participate in the false idol worship. Some of the terms and practices Christians used were misinterpreted. Pagans thought love feasts were code for incest and immorality. They thought the Lord's Supper, eating the body of Christ and drinking the blood, meant Christians engaged in as cannibalism.

Modern day Christ followers will be misunderstood. The difference may be interpreted as an attempt to show that we're better. People may think we're part of a cult with a secret language and handshake. The difference in our lives may be more evident when someone comes to Christ as their Savior as an adult and they no longer participate in the kinds of activities they used to. Non-believers don't understand how believers can get through life without the stuff of the human earthly evil desires. They should be puzzled by our behavior.

The misunderstanding or the unlike for our behavior can lead to mistreatment. Someone said, "You should expect to enter the work force and find certain levels of persecution because you live differently, because you don't get drunk on the weekend, because your integrity level is high, because you have a chaste and monogamous relationship with your wife or husband when cheating is becoming the norm." There's an expected reaction we should get from pagans, those who don't have a relationship with Christ. It may be as innocuous as "You guys are weird, a bunch of wacko birds."

There can be a distancing. A young girl who'd recently become a Christian asked English preacher Charles Spurgeon, "What friends do I need to give-up now?" He replied "You do not have to give up any of your friends, they would give you up."

Two university students in Moorhead, Minnesota, painted a mural on the wall outside their dormitory room. It showed a school of fish swimming in the same direction except for a single fish heading the opposite way. The one fish was intended to be the age-old symbol for Christ. Printed on the picture were the words, "Go against the flow." University officials, arguing the mural might offend non-Christians, ordered the students to paint over it.

If we've reverted to the sins of the pre-Christian lifestyle, the important thing to remember is that God offers second chances. Claim his forgiveness and then follow the Holy Spirit as he leads us to make the right choices.

Randy Alcorn has developed "Strategies to keep from falling." Though they're originally crafted to aid in preventing sexual immorality, they're equally applicable to any sin and more particularly those in 1 Peter 4. "1. Pay attention to what you look at and think about. 2. Give greater thought to the consequences rather than the pleasures of sin." Some of them are grieving the Lord who redeemed us, possible discipline by the Lord causing shame to other believers and family members, creating guilt that's hard to shake, losing self-respect, bringing pleasure to Satan. "3. Begin each new day by renewing sense of reverence for the Lord. 4. Periodically through each day focus fully on Christ."