

Preacher: Vicar Tim Redfield Date: November 29, December 1 and 2
Text: Romans 13:11-14 Theme: Focus on Christ

Joseph was making the best of a bad situation. His brothers had sold him into slavery and he was now living in Egypt. He was working hard to faithfully do his duties as a slave. He did his work so well that Potiphar put Joseph in charge of the household. Then one day, Potiphar's wife took a lustful interest in Joseph. Joseph resisted the temptation and said, "How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Even though Joseph ended up in prison because of the lies of Potiphar's wife, Joseph showed that he focused on God in his life. Joseph demonstrated that as a child of God, he wore the armor of light that God gives to his believers. Joseph was strengthened in his faith to resist the temptations of this sin darkened world. As we live our lives in this world we always keep our focus on Christ. We focus on him because this world is darkened with sin. Christ helps us to resist that darkness and he points us to our eternal salvation which is very near.

Part 1: The world is darkened with sin

Paul speaks about how we understand our present time and see the deeds of darkness that are in our world. As we live in our world, we realize two things. One, our world is sinful. And two, this world will come to an end. We know that the sins of this world are very tempting even to believers and these sins could destroy our faith. Since this world is coming to an end, we only have a limited time of Grace. If we lose our faith because of our sin and the end of the world comes before we are led back to faith, we will be lost eternally.

So that we can know our sins and live a life of repentance, we will take a look at some of the sins of our world. We realize that it is not just the world out there that is sinful; all of these temptations occur in our lives as well. Paul gives a list of some sins that occur in our lives. Paul lists orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, and jealousy. In order to understand how these sins can affect every one of us, we will talk a little about each one. All of these sins come from the desires of the sinful heart. When our sinful hearts dwell upon sin, this attitude eventually shows itself through actions. This list given by Paul shows how seriously God takes sin and how closely we should watch our hearts and our lives. When we give into our sinful desires, then those desires are given the number one place in our hearts and we are not fearing, loving, and trusting God above all things.

First of all, Paul mentions orgies. The word that is translated as orgies conveys the idea of "excessive feasting." This sin refers to that sin we call gluttony. This is the sin of over-indulging on food. This sin is overlooked in a world that encourages over-indulgence rather than moderation. Closely related to over-indulging on food is that sin of drunkenness. We know that drunkenness is over-indulging on alcohol. Unfortunately this sin gets overlooked far too often. People over-indulge on alcohol and don't give it a second thought. People push their limits rather than being responsible with God's gift. Both of these sins come from a sinful heart which puts desires for food and drink ahead of what God wants for us.

Next, Paul brings up sexual immorality. This sin is not just the really big sexual sins like adultery and homosexuality. The sins in this area that might get by us more easily are sins like sex before marriage, living together before marriage, boyfriends and girlfriends pushing the limits of how far they can go, pornography, and even all those lustful thoughts that people have. Related to the three previous sins is that sin of debauchery. This is a complete lack of self-control. This is completely giving oneself over to one's desires. In this sin, a person's sinful desires become their lifestyle. We can see this sin in the life of an addict. An addiction controls the life of a person. Because our sinful nature never leaves us in this life, we all struggle against an addiction to sin.

Then Paul lists dissension. Another word for this is "strife." This can be further explained as arguing among each other. In this sin both sides feel as though they are right. Dissension causes divisions among Christians. Since we are imperfect people, we never truly forget the sins of others. We need to work against this sin and deal with each other in love. Finally Paul mentions jealousy. This sin seems self-explanatory, but how often do we sit down and think about it? There are times that we wish that we had the material blessings of others. Sometimes in our jealousy we think that others obtained their success by sins. Jealousy can cloud our judgment and further the divisions among believers.

Sometimes all of these sins become so commonplace in our world that we forget that they really are sinful. Our society can influence us so much that we begin to live in the same sins. Before we know it, our lives have spiraled down that sinful path. If this were to happen we would go over into that darkness of the world. Darkness is a good picture for that sinful way of life. When the darkness of sin surrounds us there are times that we cannot see the way out. It is like being in a room with no windows, no lights at all. The room is completely dark. So dark that you cannot see your own hand in front of your face. We would not know where the door is or if any danger was near by. If someone would turn

on the light, then we would see clearly. When the darkness of sin comes into our lives, we need the light of the Savior to guide us back to forgiveness.

After taking a look at our sinfulness it is important to receive that comfort of the Gospel. Paul tells us that we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. As we have seen from all the sins that Paul listed, he was not one to take sin lightly. He mentioned all these sins so that we can more fully appreciate the message of what Christ did for us. He tells us to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. We take on Jesus' perfection. We get the credit for all the times that he resisted the sins that we fall into.

Jesus used God's gifts of food and drink responsibly. He miraculously changed water into wine at the Wedding at Cana and he miraculously fed the 5000. In both of these situations he met a need of people and did not encourage the abuse of those gifts. The Jews tried to accuse him of being a glutton and a drunkard but he showed them that his actions proved otherwise (Matthew 11:19).

Regarding sins we know that Jesus lived a pure and decent life. It is important to note that he extended forgiveness to people who had fallen into sexual sins. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman who had been married five times and was now with someone outside of marriage, he showed her that he was the Messiah who was here to save her (John 4). When the woman caught in adultery was going to be stoned to death, Jesus dispersed the angry mob and told the woman that he forgave her (John 8).

Jesus covered over all of our sins. When he declared triumphantly on the cross, "It is finished." He was letting us know that all of our sins had been paid for in full. Even though there are many sins that we still fall into, the price has been paid. He gives us his righteousness. When our Heavenly Father looks at each one of us, he sees the perfection of his Son.

Part 2: Our eternal salvation is near

We are daily looking forward to that Second Coming of our Lord. As we wait for that day, we still have those spiritual enemies that want to lead us back into the darkness. Paul encourages us to put on the armor of light. This armor is our defense against those spiritual enemies. God has given us this armor of light for our protection.

Paul has used this imagery of a soldier and his armor in other places. In Ephesians 6 he gives a full picture of that armor and we will take a brief look at that spiritual armor. Our armor includes the truth of God's Word on which we stand firm. We have the righteousness of Christ which is ours through faith. The gospel message of our Savior makes us ready to face any of the challenges of this life. Our faith gives us strength when the devil tries to tempt us because our God helps us resist those temptations. We have the Word of God as our weapon which will help us to defeat temptations and that word can cut through unbelief and create a believing heart. We also have that Salvation that Christ won for us.

The important part about this armor is that it makes us able to stand firm in our faith. No matter what temptations come our way, no matter what the world throws at us, God is on our side and he will carry us through. Think of David standing alone against the giant Goliath. David did not wear any armor or worldly protection. He came with a sling and five stones. Goliath was armed with the best protection and weapons of the time. David however was protected with God's armor. David knew that God was his strength. Just like God gave the victory to David, God also gives us the victory over our spiritual struggles. God protects us with that armor or light.

Since we know that God is protecting us, we look forward to that eternal glory which is very near. We always need to be ready for Jesus to return. He tells us to "keep watch because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42). Jesus says that the Second Coming will happen when we least expect it. It will come like a thief in the night. Since we do not know that day or hour, we live in eager expectation.

Jesus tells us that he is coming soon. In the last chapter of Revelation he tells us this three times. It is such a great encouragement to our faith to know that at any moment our Lord could come back and take us to heaven. Even if we die before his return in judgment, we know that he will raise us from the dead just like he rose from the grave. He also promises that he has prepared a place for us in heaven and he is coming back to take us to be with him (John 14:2-3).

Conclusion

During Advent, we prepare for the time when Jesus came to earth as a little infant by looking forward to the time when he will come to earth as our judge. Just like the Old Testament believers eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah, we eagerly await his return. As we look forward to that day, we clothe ourselves with Christ. We have the comfort of all that he has done. We have that joy that his righteousness gives us. That Day of Judgment will be glorious for all believers. Our Lord Jesus will give us the inheritance that he has prepared for us, that kingdom that he prepared for us before the creation of the world (Matthew 25:34). We joyfully look forward to that day.