**St Martins C3 – May 15, 2022**

**Stand Strong – Choose Life**

**Sermon Summary:**

In chapters 2 & 3 of the book of Revelation, we have a record of Christ’s thoughts towards 7 churches in what we now know as the nation of Turkey. One of the main themes of these letters is that these churches were to stand strong in the Christian faith, and resist compromise. There are warnings in these letters that they will be tempted by the ungodly thinking of the world around them, but they must resist this temptation, otherwise they will be judged by God and ineffective in their outreach.

What was true for the church in the first century is still true for us today. If we allow the values of the world to contaminate the church, we will end up being ungodly and ineffective. Therefore, we need to be aware of what Satan is likely to use in our culture to tempt us as a church, so that we stand strong against these temptations.

One way of thinking that is prevalent in our current culture, which could contaminate the church is the belief that Godly standards are outdated and irrelevant.

Before we start thinking that we would never do that, consider how easy it is for us to justify a temptation within our own lives. We justify sin, because we want to live our way, not God’s way. Then, when we fall for that temptation, we seek to adjust God’s laws to fit with our standards, rather than adjust our lives to conform to God’s moral law.

**Read: Deuteronomy 30: 11-20**

1. **God blesses those who obey His law.**

It is worth living our lives God’s way, because it is what is best for us and it ensures God’s blessings on our whole life. God’s way is best, and it ought to define the boundaries we live in.

1. **If we choose to live our lives our way, it will lead to death.**

When we stray outside of the boundaries God has put in place, we venture in to enemy territory. (John 10:10) If we compromise God’s standards, we become bound to sin, not to righteousness. There is an appearance of freedom in sinning, but it is a false freedom. Sin is like an addiction. It promises pleasure, but ultimately delivers bondage and death.

So, the next time you are tempted to justify sinning, remind yourself of the life that God has for you, and the death that Satan has for you.

1. **Our responsibility is to CHOOSE life. (1 Cor 10:13)**

God has given us the power to choose and expects us to use that empowerment to make good choices. The choice is both a one off decision to set the boundaries of which we will live by our whole life, as well as an everyday decision to hold fast to God’s standards in each situation we face.

In this life, we will be tempted to compromise God’s standards, but as followers of Christ, we will choose His way of life, not Satan’s way of death.

**Suggested Questions for Connect Groups:**

*Do you think there is still any respect for God’s moral laws, or do you think that most secular people would see them as outdated and irrelevant?*

*What does God promise us, if we obey His laws?*

*What are the spiritual implications of disobeying God’s laws, both now and in the future?*

*Why do we try and justify compromising God’s standards?*

*What could we put in place in our lives to help us resist temptation?*

*What does a commitment to obeying God’s laws look like both long-term and from day to day?*

*If a friend of yours, who isn’t a Christian, were to ask you why you follow God’s laws for your life, how would you answer them?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Defining Good and Bad**

**Hebrews 4: 12-13**

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Clarity is a good thing. When we know where the boundaries that we are not to cross are, then we can avoid them.

When we are children, we think that having no boundaries would be great. We could do what we like. But in reality what would be worse is our parents constantly changing their minds of where the boundaries are. It would lead to a very confusing and unsafe world for a child. However, when there is clarity, then justice and grace can operate freely. We needed boundaries as children and we need God’s boundaries as adults.

So, where do we get this clarity on moral issues from, now that we are adults? Well, it’s certainly not from what “feels” right to us. We needed God to clearly lay it out for all of humanity. He has done just that. His word is what gives us clarity on moral issues. What a blessing it is that God revealed His way of life to us. We don’t need to live in confusion and uncertainty, we can live with confidence and clarity, that staying within the boundaries that God has laid out will bring us life and blessing.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Say ‘no’ quickly**

**James 4: 7-10**

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Knowledge of what is right or wrong is the first thing we needed in order to follow God’s way, but knowledge alone won’t keep us from sinning. We have an enemy that is seeking to pull us away from God’s purposes for our lives. Therefore, in this life, we will constantly face temptation. Knowing this, we need to be ready to resist the temptation which will inevitably come our way.

There are two key things that James points out here in this regard. Firstly, those who are surrendered to God and remain humble before Him, will be able to resist temptation. Therefore, have we humbly surrendered every area of our lives to Christ? Especially those areas where we are more likely to fall into sin.

Secondly, James points out that we need to resist the devil. The quicker we do that, the better. Temptation becomes more powerful, the more we ponder on it. The key is, to say ‘no’ quickly. As soon as an immoral thought comes into our mind, we quickly rebuke it and consider a more Godly alternative. The devil needs resisting and the quicker we resist the better.

What area of your life does this particularly apply to?

**Wednesday’s Devotion – The blessing of conviction**

**Romans 7: 21-25**

*So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Before we become a Christian, we may not have felt particularly guilty when we did something wrong, but after we come to Christ we feel more guilty than ever, if we sin. The reason for this, is that the Holy Spirit is now at work in our hearts. The Holy Spirit sharpens our conscience, making us aware of sin and giving us the desire to avoid it.

The important thing to be aware of here, is that Godly conviction is a good thing. Feeling guilty when we have done something wrong is a work of God, not Satan. The important next step is that we listen to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and repent. We ask God’s forgiveness for our sin and we turn towards righteousness.

Notice the progression as we go through this week. We need to know the difference between right and wrong. We ought to resist temptation and avoid sin. However, even if we do sin, God has provided the means to restore us to righteousness. That is why the very next verse after the one above is: *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”* (Rom 8:1)

**Thursday’s Devotion – Where is your allegiance?**

**Romans 6: 16-18**

*Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

Now we come to one of the most important truths for us to understand in regard to leaving a life of sin and living a righteous life before God. Sin or righteousness are not morally neutral. There is significant spiritual power behind both. An example could be choosing which side you are on. Are you with Ukraine or Russia? You can’t align yourself with both. Then, the one that you give your allegiance to, is that one that has power over you. Likewise, the same applies to sin and righteousness. If we sin, we are giving power to Satan, for him to have control over our lives. If we choose righteousness we give power to Christ and He has control over our lives.

Why all this is so important is that if we choose to ignore God’s word and the conviction of the Holy Spirit and keep sinning, we have sided with Satan. We have shifted our allegiance. The consequence of this is an enslaved heart. If there are areas of our lives that this applies to, we need to humble ourselves to God and shift our allegiance back to him. As Paul says, don’t let yourself become enslaved to sin.

**Friday’s Devotion – Bondage breaking**

**Romans 8:6-8**

*The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.* *The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.**Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

For most of us, we will quickly resist temptation, or if we do sin, we will submit to God, repent of our sin and not allow ourselves to be enslaved to Satan’s power. However, sometimes even Christians persist in their sin and allow Satan access to their lives. When this happens, deliverance is still possible, but it is a harder journey.

The closest thing to likening this journey to, is a journey out of an addiction. I am not saying here that anyone with an addiction is in bondage to Satan. But, there are similarities. You know you are addicted when the alcohol has more power over you than you do over it. Likewise, you know you are in bondage to sin, when it has more power over you, than you do over it.

What do you do, if you are in this situation? – You ask for help. Not only from God, but from other Christians, who God has placed there to help restore you to righteousness. Those who will stand with you as you journey out of bondage and back to true freedom. Don’t delay any longer. Bondage to sin, leads to destruction in this life and death in the next. Christ has come to set you free, so live in the freedom and life God has for you.