

May 22, 2016

Norman Vincent Peale's Tattoo

1 Peter 2:4-12

Opening Words: Clare Boothe Luce once wrote, "*There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.*" Could it be that you have grown hopeless? The world is filled with complex problems. Many believe, the greatest problem facing America today is hopelessness. That is why First Peter speaks to us. It is an epistle of hope.

In the text for today, Peter reminds the believers of three things. First, he reminds them of the completeness of Jesus. To underscore this point, he quotes two Old Testament verses; Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. Second, he reminds them they are really nothing more than aliens in this world. Our real citizenship lies in heaven. Third, he reminds them they are to be holy examples. The eyes of their world are on them. They are examples of the faith itself. Our reading for today is First Peter, verses four through twelve. Let me call this message *Norman Vincent Peale's Tattoo*.

1 Peter 2:4-12 ⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"

⁸ and,
"A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Norman Vincent Peale told the story of walking down the streets of Hong Kong. He came across a tattoo shop. In the window were displayed samples of the tattoos available. There were all kinds of tattoos. However, one tattoo stood out. It was just three words: BORN TO LOSE. He entered the shop in astonishment and pointed to those words. He asked the Chinese tattoo artist, "Does anyone really have that terrible phrase, 'born to lose', tattooed on their body?" He replied, "Yes, sometimes." Peale said, "I just can't believe that anyone in his right mind would do that." The Chinese man simply tapped his forehead and said in broken English, "Before tattoo on body, tattoo on mind."

Can I ask you a question this morning? Would anyone here buy that tattoo? Does anyone here feel like a loser? The world is great at making us feel like losers. You stayed at home to raise your children; you sacrificed your career for them. You would do it again, but now the children are gone. You are left with empty days. There are days when you feel like a loser. You remember your parents. They had such neat and ordered lives. The bills were paid and the meals were always hot. That is not your story. You feel like a loser. Your siblings are living life in the fast lane, but you can't find the on ramp. You decided to stay at home, but now you are stuck in the Mahoning Valley. You feel like a loser. Or perhaps, you have grown comfortable with yourself. Bite by bite you put on a few pounds. Well, maybe it is not a few. Your family loves you just the way you are, but you hate to look in the mirror. You feel like a loser. Do I have to go on? Would anyone here buy that tattoo? Does anyone here feel like a loser? A poor self-image is one of those things that has haunted mankind for a long time. I believe you may find yourself in this morning's scripture lesson. If you are ready to look at our text for this morning, say, "Amen!"

Peter is writing a circular letter. He is not writing to any particular church or individual. He was writing to all the Christians of his time, so his words had to fit every situation. So what do you say to everyone that is relevant to everyone? He appeals to their most basic issues of life itself. This letter shows Peter's pastoral side. In a firm and loving way he tells them to keep living the faith. That sounds easy, but it is really quite hard. It has always been hard. In the first century they were worried about Christian persecution. The threat was obvious. In our generation it is more subtle. The threat is no longer external; it is internal. The world is encouraging us to compromise the faith away. We live in the most immoral times in American history. We have become masters at compromising everything. We should live as aliens in this world. We should always have our eyes fixed on heaven. Peter tells us today to stop compromising the faith, and start living the faith.

Today, I want to talk about living the faith. The text for today reminds us that living the faith involves three things. If you want to live the faith, then you first must learn to love yourself. How do you feel about yourself? Second, you must learn to love others. You do not live in isolation. You live in a world filled with people. Third, you must learn to love Christ. Jesus is simply the greatest life that ever lived. These three are the keys to

unlocking your faith and living satisfied lives. They will change you from feeling like a loser to a winner. So if you are tired of feeling like a loser and want to feel like a winner, say, "Amen."

Love Life

First, you must learn to love life. Look at the words Peter uses to describe his readers. They are the same words God has preserved for us today. Notice, they are not harsh words. They are affirming words. Verses nine and ten say, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* Those are God's words to you. Do you believe them? Victor Frankl once said, *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, his attitude."* I love those words because they are true.

James W. Moore tells the story of a woman who went to a doctor. It wasn't her first visit. She went to the doctor every time she was down. She asked the doctor for a new pill to make her feel better. The doctor asked her to step into the back. The storage room was filled with countless empty pill bottles. The doctor looked at the woman and said, "Each one of these bottles is like every day in your life. You have a choice. Will you fill your days with medicine that will bring hope and healing to the people in your life? Or will you fill your days with poison that will bring death? The choice is yours." That is the choice that we make every day in our life. What is your choice? This is my question for you today:

Do you love life? Jesus is the greatest gift we will ever receive. Life is the second greatest gift we will ever receive. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. And all of God's people said, "Amen!" If you want to stop feeling like a loser, love life.

Love Others

If you want to stop feeling like a loser, then start loving others. It is woven through the fabric of the New Testament. It was why Peter wrote this epistle. He is encouraging others in the faith. If he wouldn't have cared, then not a single word would have been written. I hope your attitude is not like Fredrick the Great. He said, *"The more I get to know people, the more I love my dog."*

Peter Arnett was a CNN television commentator and reporter. He tells of a time he was in Israel, in a small town on the West Bank, when a bomb exploded. Bloodied people were everywhere. A man came running up to Peter holding a little girl in his arms. He pleaded with Peter to take her to a hospital. As a member of the press, he would be able to get through the security. Peter, the man and the girl jumped into his car and rushed to the hospital. The whole time the man was pleading with him to hurry, to go faster, heartbroken at the thought the little girl might die. Sadly, the little girl's injuries were too great and she died on the operating table. When the doctor came out to give

them the news, the man collapsed in tears. Peter Arnett was at a loss for words. "I don't know what to say. I can't imagine what you must be going through. I've never lost a child." It was then that the man said, "Oh, mister! That girl was not my daughter. I'm an Israeli settler. She was a Palestinian. But there comes a time when each of us must realize that every child, regardless of that child's background, is a daughter or a son. There must come a time when we realize that we are all family."

One of the great challenges in life is staying in love with people. Let us be honest. There are many people who aren't even likeable. It would be easy to ignore them. But we can't do it, because Jesus told us, "Love one another as I have loved you." Why would Jesus say such a thing? The Master understood we find support in the healthiest relationships in our lives. And all of God's people said, "Amen!" If you want to stop feeling like a loser, love life. If you want to stop feeling like loser, love others.

Love Christ

If you want to stop feeling like a loser, then start loving Christ. Verse six refers to Jesus as the cornerstone. He is the foundation on which we build our lives. The world tells us we are losers because we never have enough. The Gospel tells us we are winners because God sacrificed it all for us.

I love the story of the man who collected old books. He met an acquaintance who had just thrown away a Bible that had been stored in the attic of his ancestral home for generations. "I couldn't read it," the friend explained. "Somebody named Guten-something had printed it." "Not Gutenberg!" the book lover exclaimed in horror. "That Bible was one of the first books ever printed. Why, a copy just sold for over two million dollars!" His friend was unimpressed. "Mine wouldn't have brought a dollar. Some fellow named Martin Luther had scribbled all over it in German."

You see, that is the story of our lives. The world says our value comes from who we are. The faith tells us we are of value because of whose we are. It is an incredible story. The God of the universe came into the world and took a human form. He lived the perfect life and was executed as a common criminal. He suffered and died. Why? Because you are so valuable to Him! God knows what we often forget. We are winners! And all of God's people said, "Amen!" If you want to stop feeling like a loser, love life. If you want to stop feeling like loser, love others. If you want to stop feeling like a loser, love Christ. I end with this thought:

Did you know, only 13% of American women consider themselves pretty. Did you know only 28% of American men think themselves handsome. 94% of American men would change something about their looks if they could. 99% of American women would change something about their looks if they could. Can I be honest with you? You are perfect! I wouldn't change a thing! The real question is, how do you feel about yourself? Do you feel like a winner or a loser? And all of God's winner's said, "Amen!"