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Quit Ye Like Men

Isaiah 5v 1-7; Hebrews 11 29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

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In Luke 12, Jesus indicates that we need to know how to interpret the present time, We are to keep our wits about us. On Monday evening, Ian and I went out to see a movie. I decided that it would be good to help Ian relax on his day off. We chose one that is based on an early, unpublished novel of Jane Austen, the woman credited with writing the finest novels in English literature. As we sat and waited for the beginning of the film, we saw the trailers for several other movies. One was in the Bridget Jones series (romantic comedy) and it depicted a woman who had been without a male companion for about five years. She was feeling lifeless and bored. Her friends exhorted her, saying, "There's nothing wrong with you that some sex won't cure."

So she goes out and finds a few men whom she likes and sleeps with a couple of them. Later, she finds out that she is pregnant and does not know which of the two men is the father. She can't decide which man she likes best. Both men say they love her and they both fall over themselves to support her in the pregnancy and both are present at the birth, each claiming the baby is his own. The trailer finishes with the woman exclaiming quizzically over the situation. "Oh my God!" she says and sinks back onto the pillows in an exasperated way.

And well she might. Would that she had called on God truly and she would have found in his word that God forbids sex outside of marriage, because it is such destructive behaviour. When God says "Don't do such and such," it is because he knows it will have destructive effects in our lives, not because he is determined to spoil our fun.

The feature film "Love and Friendship" followed. This was a twenty-first century re-write of a novel by Jane Austen which remained unpublished during her lifetime. The novel was given a new, 21st C ending where the principal character, Lady Susan, ended up living with her new husband and also her lover – all three under the same roof.

For some years now, I have avoided going to movies as much as I could, to avoid being forced to watch the mandatory celebration or depiction of homosexuality which seemed to come into every film, be it a drama, a comedy or a children's film. Now, with the advent of homosexual marriage which has swept around the world in short order, it seems that this movie sub-theme is no longer necessary. Now it is polyandry, which means a woman having two men in a three-some relationship. The fact that I saw this theme in two movies in one evening appals me. Where will it all end?

Today, we face a tsunami of false teaching from our culture. It declares that loving one another means expressing our physical urges, even ones contrary to Scripture. It urges us to accept and celebrate homosexual behaviour. There is nothing new about it, except that these days it is being urged from within the church. And it is being trumpeted in the media and legitimised in parliaments around the world. I am not saying that people with same-sex attraction are unredeemable sinners because Paul tells us the opposite in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that Jesus rescues us and helps us if we are caught in that lifestyle. "Such were some of you," he says.

During the public debate over same-sex marriage there were warnings that this was a slippery slope and it would be followed by demands to legalise multiple marriage partners and then even more extreme relationships like paedophilia and bestiality. The evidence of Monday night suggests that the softening-up process has started for three-way relationships by making it a subject of humour. At this stage it is outrageous humour but it is the beginning of the process of normalising such a change. What will be the next step of our culture's moral decay?

After the movie, I woke early in the morning following with the words in my mind, "Quit ye like men." "Where have I heard that?" I thought. I know it is a famous quote. So I went to my encyclopaedia – well, to Google and typed it in. Lo and behold, there it is in the Bible, but in the King James Version, which I have not read for years, which is why I did not immediately recognise the quote.

Paul instructs us in I Corinthians 16:13: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong." The NIV says, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."

Our passage in Hebrews today exhorts us in the same way. These men and women of faith are extreme models for us. Their courage, tenacity and sheer doggedness is inspiring. They kept obeying God despite strong mental and physical torture. In the next chapter, there is an ironic wee comment: "*You* have not yet resisted temptation to the point of shedding blood."¹ Ok, I get the picture. I need to man-up and stop feeling sorry for myself. I face relatively minor difficulties.

"Be on your guard" means that there will be things that seek to trip us up and we need to be careful what we head towards and how we act. This means facing up to the truth that we are watched and that our lives have significance. We are watched by those who have gone before us, by the world as well as by our fellow church members.

¹in Hebrews 12:4

This is no time to be childish, pleasing ourselves. We can have an effect of being salt and light to a decaying world, a crumbling civilisation. What are you going to be remembered for? Will you be swept away in the tide of corruption that threatens us or will you stand for virtue which springs from the truth of God's word?

It has significance as we saw in Galatians 6, if we sow to the flesh, we will reap corruption; sowing to the Spirit, we will reap life. When we focus on how we feel, and make our decisions on that basis, we make a grave mistake. The Bible commends those who obey God, not those who are dominated by their feelings.

So we do well when we choose what is right instead of sin that temporarily makes us feel good. That demonstrates maturity. We keep our eyes fixed on the prize of God's promises for our future. Ephesians 4:14 says we ought not to be tossed about by every new teaching, every fresh temptation, every wave of discouragement that comes our way. Let's be servant-leaders, who can be counted on—day after day, for the long haul. Everyone here has either a positive or a negative influence on the rest of the congregation. Am I my brother's keeper? Yes I am. What I think about, what I agree with, what I model, what I partner with affects the whole body of Christ.

Paul says we have a huge number of cheerleaders who can see us from heaven. (*Heb 11*)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

To take your stand on the principles of God's word requires the courage to risk being misunderstood - the courage that risks being marginalized and isolated. This courage is celebrated in Kipling's poem, "If":

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.*

...and so on. And significantly, the poem ends,

*Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!*

This man does not count the opinions of other men higher than God's, and for this reason, has a reputation amongst men. This man best gets his courage by finding out God's opinion and sticking to that in thought, word and deed. He remembers Jesus' words, "The meek shall inherit the earth." Not the weak, the meek. Meekness is self-controlled strength. Think of a stallion reined in to a collected trot.

This takes courage and strength. Paul prays that believers be ...

"...strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:16-17).

The inner man means the soul, the part that lives on when our physical body gives up. If our inner man were on display today, would we be embarrassed? Would it be an awkward, gangly figure, whose muscles are weak and uncoordinated? A child-like figure who cannot delay pleasure for future gain? Someone limping because of wounds from the past? Someone who's every step is hindered by unforgiveness which perpetuates pain? A thin, weedy inner man who is blown about by political correctness?

Let's strengthen our inner man, look to Jesus by faith, and trust in his work for us on the cross and his Word to us in the Bible. Choosing to have God's attitudes and viewpoint strengthens our faith muscles.

This is what we will be doing in the "Freedom in Christ" course on Friday mornings. Strengthening the inner man. Being trained so that we can stand in the evil days coming ahead.

The description of faith-filled people in Hebrews 11 ends with

" Others were tortured ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated the world was not worthy of them. .. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

So our lives of faith somehow meld together with theirs at the end of time. God has planned to bring all things together in Christ and then perfection will come. The people who have gone before us have suffered all sorts of things and kept faith in God, kept trusting in Him and in his word and in his promises. Together with them, let us persevere, treasure God's word and keep the faith handed down to us.

(Ian) Let me add two points to what Helen has said.

Our culture's moral values were strongly influenced by the Bible and Christianity but over the last 50 years we all know there has been a steady erosion of the foundational belief system. As a consequence, the ethics and morals built on that Biblical basis have been weakened and are being actively destroyed.

On Friday night, Everyman had a guest speaker, Dr David Richmond, past professor of Gerontology. He addressed the matter of legalising euthanasia. It is the current debate. It is easy to make changes sound kind and positive but it takes little investigation to see how dangerous and destructive the loosening of our moral and ethical standards are.

A 2010 report on euthanasia in Belgium considered the cases of a random sample of 208 people who were euthanized. Out of these 208, 51 had had no discussion with the doctor and appallingly 15 had clearly rejected the offer and were killed anyway!

Despite the common fear about a painful death, a report from the Oregon Euthanasia office tells that pain was not the primary reason for requesting euthanasia. Pain ranked near the bottom of the list after fear of loss of independence, being less able to engage in enjoyable activities, loss of dignity, loss of control of bodily functions and being a burden on family.

God gave us his good ways for a reason and we are foolish to abandon the standards he put in place to protect us and especially the vulnerable. We need to be alert to maintain the moral safeguards which have served us well for generations.

Finally a word of encouragement:

As we go through the events of life, there are times when we feel lost and helpless. It may be the onslaught of the world's views has worn you down. Maybe your future looks insecure – the job, the lack of a job, a terminal illness or at least a very challenging condition. It may be that things just aren't working out the way you thought they should do and why has God let it happen like this?

When life is like that – and those things come to us all from time to time – then we need to turn to the only one who can really help us.

John 8:12 "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Immediately, we are told that Jesus knows where he is going. In v14: *I know where I came from and where I am going.* He not only walks in light but he is light. He knows where he is going.

So if you want to walk in the light rather than stumble in darkness, Jesus says the way to do it is to follow him – to do what he says, live life the way he directs.

V12: *Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

Illustration – Not lost

I like the story of the grandfather who took his little grandson for a walk in the woods. As they were walking along they stopped for a moment & the grand-father asked, "Do you know where we are?" The little boy said, "No!"

The grandfather asked, "Do you know where we're going?" And the little boy again said, "No!" The grandfather chuckled & said, "Well, I guess you're lost then." The boy looked up at his grandfather & said, "No, I'm not lost. I'm with you."

And when Jesus is with us we're never lost. He is our light & our salvation.

So be encouraged. You have the light of the world living in your heart. He promises to lead you, protect you, shelter you and give you his light. He promises you will know the truth and that will set you free.

C.S. Lewis said, "I believe in Christ like I believe in the sun. Not because I see it, but by it I see everything else." Knowing Jesus changes everything. It gives us the ability to see things from a different and a true perspective.

If you are seeking guidance or direction in life, and you are walking with Jesus you are by definition not lost. Remember the little grandson, "No, I'm not lost. I'm with you." If we are with Jesus, we are not lost, we are at the centre of his will for us and he knows where he is going with us.