

Looking Back, Looking Forward.

I was originally going to kick off the new year and my time here at BBC in the book of Hebrews... I have the outline for the sermon series done... I know what passages I'm going to be preaching from for the next 4 months or so.... BUT, I really felt that this was necessary to do...

So.. the title of this sermon is called - looking back, looking forward. And as you will see, this is going to tie in very nicely with the sermon series in Hebrews entitled "Jesus is better" which we are going to start soon.. Hopefully... So look forward to that - its something I've been preparing for the past two months.

But this week... we are going to begin our time together by looking back.

LOOKING BACK

I don't know how you guys spent the new year so far, and I don't know how you guys spent 2014... but I suspect that it was less than ideal... and you know.. the world has gotten into this habit of making resolutions.. this year, I'm going to make sure its better than last year... and they make these resolutions by looking inwards to themselves and trying to find the answer to a BETTER LIFE inside of you.

You know what I'm talking about... In fact, according to the 2012 issue of TIME's magazine, here are the top 10 most popular New Year's resolutions. Ironically these also happen to be the one's that are most easily broken. Here they are: Lose weight and get fit.. Quit smoking. Learn something new i.e. a new language, eat healthier and diet, get out of debt and/or save up money, spend more time with family, travel to new places, go to bed earlier and get more sleep, do volunteer work, and finally, drink less...

And the world believes that once you do these things... that once you become a better version of yourself, you will be happy. Your life will have more meaning. I just need to be a better person than I am now - that's the very essence of new years resolutions, right? Become a better me. And so more and more, our money our time our energy are being pushed into - I gotta be a better version of me...

And although I can't speak from much experience, having lived only 21 years.. the truth is: you will always be disappointing to you. It doesn't matter how you transform, whether that's becoming chiseled, or making a lot of money, or getting that bikini body... still not gonna be enough.

Nothing you EVER do will EVER make your life better in a way that counts. You will never be satisfied. More sex. More money. More health. More friends. More fame. More power. ITS NEVER ENOUGH. And here's why.

The reason your life sucks, the reason why you are always tired... the reason why your life isn't fulfilling, the reason why you are always left feeling empty the morning after, the reason why you always grasp for more and more... is simply that you ARE THE PROBLEM.

You will never become a better enough version of you to live a life WITHOUT regret. You will always fall short. BECAUSE...YOU ARE THE PROBLEM. Is this ringing any bells here? Any words that come into mind? Like SIN?

SO when we look back... and evaluate our lives... there will always be regret. Because of sin. But I'm here today, telling you - beginning of 2015 - the answer to that problem is not you becoming a better version of yourself. So, I know that many of you guys have made new years resolutions - and I certainly don't want to come across as being cynical - in fact, I believe making resolutions is a very Christian thing to do. But what I'm saying is... making resolutions that go along the lines of - I'm going to become a better version of me" is (to put it rather bluntly) an absolute waste of time.

So. 2015. We're already 4 days in. And we all want to live a better life. We want to live an UNWASTED LIFE. A life that counts. A LIFE WITHOUT REGRET. RIGHT? If we retain any dignity as human beings, that's what we ALL should be wanting - a better life. a life without regret, a life that counts. A life that has MEANING.

Well. how do we do that? What should we be doing in the New Year to live a life without regret?

The answer is not - become a better you.

With that, would you turn with me in your bibles to 2 Cor. 7:10.

Ok. before we get into the text. Here's the thing. I can imagine that when we look back at our lives... most of us feel grief, sorrow. we feel regret. Right? At those wasted days... months, years.... and the truth is, to some degree, that's going to follow us the rest of our lives. We are always going to feel grief in one form or another. but what the Bible says here is that there are two kinds of grief. (1) A GODLY grief which leads to salvation without regret - A LIFE WITHOUT REGRET - and (2) a WORLDLY grief which leads to death..

This is important. When we look back and evaluate our lives, there will always be grief... but there's one that leads to life without regret and one which leads to death.

Ok. But here's where it gets confusing. How do you know the difference between godly grief and worldly grief?

Well lets start with worldly grief and we will work our way back up to godly grief.

Here's what worldly grief means.. here's what it means to walk in sorrow over sin and over failings, that isn't really godly but has some sorrow to it. Worldly grief is almost always horizontal. Here's what it looks like... a lot of you have kids... or have had kids... who are now grown up. But let me ask the parents in this room... how many of you have kids that are sad because they caught CAUGHT? They're not really sad at doing something wrong but sad because they got busted? So they're saying sorry with their lips but they don't really mean it. They are more sorry that they got caught. This is horizontal grief. It has nothing to do with God. There is no acknowledgment of sin against God. It's just this sense of ... MAN I'VE REALLY BLOWN IT. MAN, my wife is really angry with me... MAN, I'm going to get fired at work for this.... And there might be a lot of tears rolling down the face and real sorrow going on... but this kind of grief is just emotional. not spiritual.

You see, there's no vertical aspect to this grief. It is grief regarding something messed up in your life but it is never primarily about sin. You might be sorrowful about the results of your sin but you never feel grief over the sin itself. And you certainly don't bring that sin before God.

SO here's what you end up doing. If you are a child... you begin to think of ways of... next time, how can I reach into the cookie jar before dinner without getting caught? Or if you are a student - how can I cheat on the next test without getting caught... Or if you are a cheating husband - how can I meet with that lady without my wife catching me... you see. There is no grief over the sin. And that's because it's only horizontal. There is no vertical aspect to this grief. You are not broken over your sin before God. And what makes this WORLDLY grief scary is that you can be sad for the RIGHT reasons! You can be sad that you didn't make enough money to feed your family the last year. You can be sad over the fact that you spent too much money on alcohol last year. But see here, the key characteristic of WORLDLY grief is that you are just sad at the way your life is right now. And here's the thing.. It's the same thing I've been saying since the beginning of the sermon and I'm saying it again - the SOLUTION is not BECOMING A BETTER YOU. The solution is not learning to cheat better. The solution isn't even forcing yourself not to cheat. More than that, the solution isn't even working harder and making more money.

Because here's what you're doing... in trying to make your life better by making yourself BETTER - all you're really doing, AT BEST - is deceiving yourself into believing that you are somehow TAMING this wild animal we call SIN.

Here's an illustration I think will be helpful...there used to be this TV show called "When Animals Attack" .. there might still be rip offs of this show on youtube...anyways, its basically a show that broadcasts people doing silly things in front of wild animals being attacked. Now, there was this one time they showed a man walking around this set with a lion on a leash.. he would get this fully grown lion to sit down. Lie down. Walk over... do all the things a regular dog does. And then after a while, this woman in a bathing suit comes over and starts taking pictures with the lion. (HOW STUPID IS THAT LOOK) Well, as the title of the program suggests, the lion attacked the woman. Don't worry, she

lived to tell the tale.. but what I found strangely humorous was that the producers of that show interviewed her after the attack and the woman was shocked that the lion attacked her!

And THAT's exactly what a lot of us do with our sin...notice I said OUR sin. It's part of you. It's inside you and the more you try to become a better version of yourself without dealing with the elephant in the room that is sin, you are just deceiving yourself. Now, it might take on different forms but the lethal influence of sin is so pervasive that the Bible says that even our righteous acts are as filthy rags before God... And going back to the illustration of when animals attack.... Sin IS a wild animal. In fact, the Bible itself likens sin to a hungry lion seeking something to devour... and like a hungry lion, sin CANNOT be tamed. It is always seeking to kill. WHO? Who is sin out to kill? US. You and me. And yet, we are less concerned with fighting SIN and more concerned with taming it. I'll just suppress that desire. I'll just do better next time. I'll make sure it doesn't happen again.. you see something wrong with this picture?? ME ME ME.... I'll deal with my sin. I'll become a better version of myself... But you see, the answer to this sin problem is not within ourselves. Why do you think we have a cross??? Because we have no answers to this problem! We cannot defeat sin. We cannot become a better enough versions of ourselves to FIND LIFE without regret. No.

The answer lies outside of us.

Which leads us back now to godly grief.... it says here that godly grief produces repentance which leads to salvation without regret. Ok. First things first. You can differentiate godly grief from worldly grief because while worldly grief is horizontal, godly grief is primarily VERTICAL.

Godly grief is not sad that things turned out the way it did. IT is SAD because of SIN. THAT I SINNED BEFORE GOD. THAT I DID NOT LIVE 2014 IN A WAY THAT BROUGHT GLORY TO GOD. GODLY GRIEF IS SORROWFUL OVER the fact that I have been living a life in rebellion against GOD!

I find it very striking that in Psalm 51 which records for us the prayer of repentance that David prayed after he committed rape and murder... there is not one mention of Bathsheba whom he had raped. And Uriah her husband whom he had killed. Rather, it says... AGAINST YOU OH LORD YOU ONLY HAVE I SINNED.

HOW CAN HE SAY THAT? AFTER RAPING A MARRIED WOMAN, ONLY TO FIND OUT LATER SHE IS PREGNANT, AT WHICH TIME HE ORDERS THAT HER HUSBAND BE KILLED JUST SO THAT THE KING COULD SAVE FACE... AFTER ALL THAT - not one mention of his regret towards them. INSTEAD.. AGAINST YOU, oh LORD, you only have I sinned.

Oh, and this just happens to be THE place we go to for a biblical model of repentance. Why? Because... this godly grief which produces repentance is primarily concerned

with God. It is vertical, not horizontal. It is broken over sin and not the consequences of sin because you are SO AWARE of a HOLY and RIGHTEOUS GOD who HATES SIN. And you realize, that any and all the regret you feel in your life is not owing to lack of self improvement but to a failure to live up to God's standards and to live a life reflecting and exulting in the glory of God... and so you... repent. You kneel before God in prayer and.. there might be weeping. Or there might be an anguished silence. Or there might be loud cries of pain. But there will always be a BROKENNESS over sin. And how do you know you are broken over sin? You will stop lying to yourself. You know exactly what I'm talking about... Those lies of self-deception that whisper to your conscious "I'll do better next time"; "I won't do it again" "I'll become a better version of myself"... No. True brokenness, true godly grief over sin produces repentance of this kind.

It brings you before the throne of God in prayer, and as you kneel there broken and on the verge of suffocating under the weight of sin against God... you look to Him who is seated at the right hand of God... Who stands in our defense. Who died for our sins and even now continues to offer up prayers of intercession to the Father on our behalf. Here's what you do. You fix your eyes upon Jesus and you consider all that He has done for you and continues to do for You and you bask in that crazy love of God... that tremendous long-suffering patience of God, and the glory of His grace...and the majesty of His beauty and you fall in love with Him again... and again... and again...

And here's why this kind of repentance.. this kind of brokenness over sin and this beholding and fixing our eyes upon the glory of GOd in Jesus Christ... here's why this will lead to a life without regret. Because as we fix our eyes upon Christ, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another...2 Cor. 3:17. The more we behold Christ, the more we become like Him. The more we will partake in the indestructable joy and peace of the Triune God - and if nothing else will, THAT will lead to a life without regret.

Do you guys remember the time I came here and preached from John 17 and said that the great hope of the Christian life is not eternal life? But rather, the great hope of the Christ life is the glory of God? Well, I'm just saying the same thing from a different angle...

You will never be satisfied until you behold the glory of God. That's what we were created to do! And to behold the glory of God, not once, not twice, but continually on a day to day basis, we must have a deep brokenness over sin which brings us before God daily in repentance and inspiring within us a deeper appreciation for the cross of Christ...

LOOKING FORWARD

Throughout the sermon, I've been stressing that the way to live a life without regret is not to become a better version of yourself. And I think I need to make this clear so none of you misunderstand me... because I'm sure that a lot of you have made New Year's Resolutions that were on that top 10 list compiled by Time's magazine.. Here's what I'm

NOT saying. I'm NOT saying that you should disregard your resolutions to go on a diet and eat healthier... or quit smoking. or spend more time with family. or do volunteer work.. or make more money, Whatever it may be, I'm not saying that these sorts of resolutions are inherently BAD. What I'm saying and what I've been saying the whole time is this: DON'T expect that keeping these resolutions are the key to a better life. In fact, here's what we should all be doing. In light of what I've been talking about so far... we ought to all have one New Year's resolution that stands tall high over and above all the other mini-resolutions; namely, we should all be RESOLVED: to fix our eyes upon Christ. Here's how Hebrews 12:1 puts it... Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely...and let us run the race with perseverance... fixing our eyes upon Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith... In the new year... let us lay aside every sin to be sure... but let us also cast aside every WEIGHT which gets in the way of running with Jesus! The question we ought to be asking ourselves in the New Year is NOT - is it sin? Is it sinful to buy this bag? Is it sinful to buy that car? That's about the lowest question you can ask as human beings, much less as Christians. Rather, ask yourself this:

DOES IT HELP ME RUN.

DOES IT HELP ME TO SEE JESUS? Does watching that R-rated movie help me see Jesus? Or does it get in the way? Does going on that vacation help me see Jesus? Or does it take my attention away from Jesus to the comforts and pleasures of this world?

As a church, I want this to be our motto for the New Year - 2015. RESOLVED: to see more of Jesus. And that means laying aside EVERYTHING which gets in the way of our seeing Jesus... and pursuing those things which helps us see Him... Does reading the Bible help you see Jesus. Does praying help? Does confessing our sins help? Do Sunday mornings help? You bet! Commit yourself to these things with the desire to see more of Jesus and God will meet you through these things...

And at this point, I want to pause briefly and tie in this theme of seeing Jesus Christ with the sermon series we will begin starting next week... All we are going to be doing really for the next 4 months or so is go through the book of Hebrews and learn how to read our Bibles to see Jesus... So that when we read the story of Moses or David, we are not just stopping with Moses and David, but we are able to see Jesus.. See how Jesus is better than these great men... and how Moses and David and the entire Bible is pointing toward Christ...

I'll end with one last point... In regards to fighting and killing sin. I am aware that a lot of us, including myself, are grieved over the presence of certain habitual sins which we just cannot seem to have victory over. Well, at this time, I want to briefly how to have victory over sin in 2015... the answer is not in taming the sin, but killing it. And here's how you kill sin. You kill sin by... you guessed it - by fixing yourself on Jesus Christ. You can't kill the works of darkness without basking in the radiance of the white-hot shining light of Jesus Christ... and developing a spiritual appetite for the glory of God that displaces, as it were, your appetite for sin... Think of it this way. Our souls are like a

cup that is full all the way with water. We think that in our fight against sin, we have to pour the water out before we add something in, but trust me when I say this, if we pour the water out, we will just fill it back with water again. In other words, if we stop “sinning” we will replace it with other “sins.” If I stop watching porn, I will start smoking pot. If I start cheating on my wife, I will start building my identity around my career. As Thomas Chalmers, the prolific Scottish Puritan put it, “sin can only be displaced by the expulsive power of new and greater affections..(paraphrase).

The only way we are going to kill sin is to displace sin with something that is weightier. With something that is greater and can satisfy and invoke our affections more than SIN can.... And so, we fight and kill sin by cultivating affections for Christ – and here is what it looks like: (drop a rock in a cup full of water)... Jesus is so beautiful, so great, so majestic, so satisfying to our souls - so more weightier and BIGGER than SIN that He will DISPLACE the sin in our lives. THAT'S how you kill sin!

So let those two hopes, the hope of victory over sin which clings so close, and the hope of the glory of God, motivate you to live lives in 2015 that are resolved to see more of Jesus Christ.

And next week, we will see just how exactly we can fulfill that resolve to see more of Jesus.

Let's pray...