

Character Building Messages Striving For Moral Excellence

Ken Birks, Pastor/Teacher

I. Introductory Remarks.

Acts 2:40 *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."*

In this lesson our focus will be about our commitment to moral excellence. The need for the church to exhibit a sense of moral excellence to the world is a critical need in the world which we live. We are living in an hour in which wickedness and a lack of morality is on a continuing increase.

- **Our Culture promotes a lack of morality.**

We live in a society or culture that condones and promotes sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, abortion and filthy and coarse language. Our society is plagued by murder, teen age pregnancies, gang violence, drug usage and many other ills. All of which I have just mentioned is flaunted flagrantly through music, television, movies, books, magazines and other media sources.

And if all of this is not enough, judgment and justice are compromised too. We are seeing criminals go free because of the corruption of our justice system.

Ecclesiastes 3:16 *Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.*

- **Christians are called to stand against the tide of wickedness.**

This is truly a time to be saved from a perverse generation. God is calling us as Christians to stand in opposition to all we see and hear, while walking in a moral excellence that is in direct contrast to the evil around us.

- **People of valor are needed.**

It takes a person of valor to stand against this tide of wickedness and moral depravity that is sweeping our land. Unless we are committed to moral excellence, we too shall be swept up in this tide of wickedness.

- **A commitment to moral excellence is needed.**

We must be people with the strength of mind or spirit that enables us to encounter the culture in which we live with a firmness that results from a commitment to moral excellence. This is something we have all been called to do.

Philippians 2:15 *that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...*

Matthew 5:13-14 *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

II. Our Call to Moral Excellence.

We find in Peter's second epistle where he exhorts us to add certain ingredients to our faith, otherwise we too, will fall and be swept in this tide of wickedness.

2 Peter 1:5-6 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness...*

2 Peter 1:10 *Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble...*

- **Peter says, "We must add virtue to our faith."**

Virtue is defined as moral excellence. Thayer's' Greek Lexicon defines it as a virtuous course of thought, feeling or action that leads to moral goodness; any particular moral excellence as modesty or purity.

Webster's Dictionary defines it as moral excellence; conformity to a standard of right; a particular moral excellence – manly strength or courage and valor – a commendable quality or trait; Potency, chastity, especially in women; purity of conduct and intention. Excellence is defined as eminently good: first-class, outstanding.

This is what Peter says by the Holy Spirit that we are called to and what we must be continually adding to our faith if we are to keep from being stumbled by the world. The apostle Paul speaks a lot concerning our moral excellence to the degree that we have been espoused to Christ as a chaste virgin.

- **We have been exposed to Christ as a chaste virgin.**

2 Corinthians 11:2 *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines chaste as being pure from carnality, modest, pure from every fault, immaculate. The word virgin means clean, pure and holy and applies to all Christians who have come to personally know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

1 Peter 1:13-16 *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

As you can see, God really does desire to have a people who are striving for moral excellence (remarkably good). He expects us to be committed to in every area of our conduct in a number of areas such as sexual purity, language, personal integrity and honesty and the lust of the eyes and flesh.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 *Abstain from every form of evil.*

Proverbs 20:7 *The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.*

Colossians 3:5 *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

Colossians 3:8-9 *But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*

Ephesians 5:1-5 *Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor*

covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

These are all areas in which Christ wants us to add to our faith moral excellence. We should be superior to the world in all of these areas if our light is to shine in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

III. The Example of Joseph.

When I think of various Bible characters that were not only committed to moral excellence but also exhibited it, Joseph immediately comes to mind. Joseph was a person of impeccable character and moral excellence even in the midst of the most adverse circumstances.

Joseph was sold by his brothers to Midianite traders who took him to Egypt and sold him as a slave on the slave market.

Genesis 39:1 *Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.*

He could have become bitter towards God and allowed his morality to become polluted, but instead he grew in godliness while preserving in the midst of unjust treatment.

There is a tendency within man to compromise and fall back in his moral conduct when he is going through the fiery trials of life.

Remember! It's during perseverance that we add godliness to our faith.

- **The blessing of God was upon Joseph's life and his Masters house because of his commitment to moral excellence.**

Genesis 39:2-4 *The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority.*

- **Joseph had an opportunity to compromise his moral excellence, but chose not to. It is during the trials that we add to our faith.**

Genesis 39:6-10 *Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." ⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" ¹⁰So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.*

- **His standard of righteousness he had set for himself protected him from compromising his testimony.**

What kind of standards are you setting for yourself? Setting standards are very important in your overall growth into moral excellence. If you do not sit down and deliberately set standards for your life and family, you will be swayed by the emotion of the moment.

He had an integrity towards his employer and towards God that he refused to compromise.

- **He was put into prison for not giving into His masters wife's desires towards him.**

Genesis 29:20 *Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.*

He could have become bitter but didn't and found favor with the keeper of the prison and was eventually released and became ruler over all of Egypt behind Pharaoh.

IV. Concluding Remarks.

Joseph is a type of the person God is looking for in these last days. Darkness and sorrow are going to come upon the earth in these last days just as it did in Joseph's day. The world will look to its own prophets and wise men for help, but will find nothing.

Then it will be that those who are of an excellent spirit will be called forth to show leadership and guidance through troublous times. These are those, like Joseph, who continued to exhibit moral excellence in the midst of the fiery trials of life.

Daniel 11:32-33 *"Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. "And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering.*

You may not be called to give wisdom and counsel on a world wide scale the way Joseph was, but we all will have a field of people around us who are depending upon our moral excellence to lead them out of their misery.

Isaiah 60:1-3 *Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*