Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

In Genesis 6 we are told that the Lord saw the wickedness of all humanity and that “*every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*.” So, their thoughts were 100% evil. Now, I trust that that is not how it is with you and me! But , and this is just for the sake of illustration, if sin *somehow* affected just a quarter of our thoughts, so 75% pure and just 25% tainted by sin, we would have still have a huge problem. You see, according to modern medical research, we process around 10,000 thoughts per day. And if a quarter of them are somehow affected by sin, that would mean just over 912,000 sin infected thoughts every year of our lives. And so, at my age, that would mean over 47,000,000 sinful thoughts, so far.

But it’s not just our thoughts that are a problem, is it. As James explains in the first chapter of his epistle, “*Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin*.” So, sinful thoughts can lead to sinful actions. And if it were possible to connect the memory of any one of us to a computer and play back the recorded scenes up on the projector for us all to see, just from this past week, there would surely be scenes that every single one of us would find rather embarrassing.

And I am talking here about professing Christians! So, why is this? What is going on? Shouldn’t we *not* be sinning? And if we do sin, often, could we lose our salvation?

Well, these are the things we want to think about this afternoon as we consider the teaching of scripture under this theme: **wonderful news for weary sinners**! And we are going to look at three Scripture passages together. The first one is about **the reality of *remaining* sin**. The second one gives us **the recipe for *resisting* sin**. And the third one explains the **reward that *awaits forgiven sinners***.

1. So, first of all, **the reality of remaining sin**.
   1. And our biblical illustration here is **King** **David**. Can anyone tell us how God described David in the Bible? He called Him a man after His own heart. So, there is no doubt that David was a true believer. And David did wonderful things in the service of the Lord. And God told David that because of his dedicated service, a son of his would always rule as Israel’s King – a promise which pointed to the coming of Jesus. But after all this, we then get **2 Samuel 11**. Do you know what happens in 2 Samuel 11? David stole another man’s wife – Bathsheba. And then he compounded that sin by arranging to have her husband killed in battle. And all this was done by the man after God’s own heart.
   2. And this brings us to our first Scripture passage. Please turn with me to **Psalm 32:1-5** (p. 462). This is where we see the reality of remaining sin.
      1. Psalm 32 is one of the 6 individual Psalms known as the **penitential** **Psalms**. And boys and girls, penitential means ‘to be sorry for sin.’ So, a penitential Psalm is an ‘I am sorry for my sin’ Psalm. And I encourage you to look up the penitential Psalms and read them, especially when you have sinned. They are truly comforting.
      2. So, look at **verses 1-2** (Read). Now, note what it *does not say*; it does not say, Blessed is the man who *never* sins. For if that was the case then blessing would be beyond our reach. Instead, we see the reality of remaining sin on display: “*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered*.” So, the fact that we do transgress or sin is assumed. And this is the consistent teaching of Scripture:
         1. We read it earlier in **Romans 7**, where Paul laments the fact that even though he is a believer, he still does what he does not want to do, and he still does not do what he wants to do.
         2. But the clearest verse on this is **1 John 1:8**: “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*.”
         3. Until we go to be with the Lord, or He returns, we will not be free of sin. And this sin is typically described as remaining sin – the sin that remains in us even though we wish it did not and despite all our efforts to avoid sin.
      3. But there are right ways and wrong ways to deal with sin. In **verses 3-4**, David describes the physical, emotional and spiritual toll that *unconfessed* sin has on the believer: He says, “*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer*.”
         1. Do you know what David is describing? Have you experienced feeling ill or empty or burdened because of your sins? Does this describe you, right now, perhaps? Well, this is your conscience at work. And this is a grace of God, because it is designed to lead you to Christ. When you can’t find peace anywhere, you will find peace in Christ!
            1. In **Matthew 11:28**, Jesus said, “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*.” He says, give me your guilt-burden; take it off and give it to me, and I will give you peace.
            2. **1 John 1:9** puts it this way: “*If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.”
      4. So, the right way to deal with sin is through confession. And this is what David speaks about in **verse 5**, “*I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin*.” And if you are one of those who right now knows the heavy burden of sin’s guilt, then join David who went to Jesus in confession, and enter the rest and blessing of forgiveness.
2. Well, having considered **the reality of remaining sin**, please turn with me now to **Colossians 3** (p. 984). And here we see **the recipe for resisting sin**.
   1. And we begin with **wrong recipe**. And I am sure we all know what happens when you follow the wrong recipe, or you follow the right recipe the wrong way – your cake is a flop! Well, Paul wrote this letter to believers who had come under the influence of false teachers. And you will see in **2:16** that these false teachers were forbidding certain foods and drinks, and requiring the observance of Jewish feast days and ceremonies, and the worship of angels, to try and stop sins of the flesh like lust and gluttony. But look at what Paul says in **verse 23**: “*These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*.”
      1. So, man-made rules about food and rituals, etc. is the wrong recipe for resisting sin. Sadly though, this way of thinking has continued in the church ever since then. One famous example is a man who came to be known as **Simon the Stylite**. A style was a sort of rocky pillar with a flat top that was found in the desert. When he was 13 years old, after reading the beatitudes, Simon wanted to be a dedicated follower of Jesus. When he was 16, he entered a monastery. He hated sin and he did all that he could to avoid sin. But he was so zealous, that no one wanted to be around him, and he was asked to leave. So, he lived alone in a small hut for 1 ½ years, often fasting for long periods. He later would just keep standing in one spot until he collapsed from exhaustion. He then went out into the desert and lived in a kind of cave off food that people brought him. But his desire to be alone and to meditate was always interrupted by people who came to look at him or seek guidance from him. So, to get away from people, he went further into the desert and found a style and climbed up the 3m to the flat top. And he survived on the bread and goat’s milk that local boys would pass up to him. But he still felt that he was too close to other people. So, he moved ‘house’ to other styles until he found one with a platform 15m above ground level. The top was about 1m of surface area with a natural kind of edge that kept him from rolling off while he slept. And he lived up there for more than 30 years, performing daily devotional rituals and even preaching to the crowds that gathered below, until he died one night, right up on top of the style.
      2. So, what are you thinking, having heard this? Are you *impressed* by that devotion? Do you *admire* his desire to resist sin? Or do you think, that is nuts!
      3. It is the basic idea behind monks and nuns and monasteries, isn’t it – do not marry, do not talk, eat simple foods, fast, wear rough clothes, use prayer beads, follow daily rituals, pray to the saints, own nothing but give everything to the poor… And we cannot look into the heart of all those who try and live like this, but **verse 23** says, “*These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*.” This is the *wrong* recipe for resisting sin.
   2. So, what is the right recipe for resisting sin? We see it in **3:1-2**: “*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth*.” Let’s break this down a little:
      1. Note how Paul starts: “*If then you have been raised with Christ*…” And this is not “if” in the sense of maybe you have or maybe you have not, it is definite – *Since* you have been raised with Christ… If you are a believer, then you are a resurrected one – you are a joined to Christ one – you are a new creation whose life is hidden in Christ. When God sees you, He sees Christ, whom He loves, so He loves you! That’s the ***who*** *you are* part of this recipe.
      2. And then follows the ***what*** *you must do* part of the recipe: “*Seek the things that are above, where Christ is … not on things that are on earth*.” So, what does this mean? It means is that your feelings and this world tell you that the best things, the most fun things, the most joyful things, the most meaningful things, the most pleasurable things are sex, sports, money, cars, houses, clothes, food, drink, marriage, friends, etc. And notice that none of these things are bad in and of themselves. In fact, in their place, they are good gifts from God. But there are also perversions of these things – sex outside marriage, pornography, gambling, over-eating or drinking, etc. And whether it is the good and in its place form of these things or the perversions, the problem is when we “seek” them or “set our mind or heart’ on these things. In other words, we pursue them and think about them a lot. We attach meaning and joy and purpose to them. We *need* them. We cannot be happy without them. We are upset when we can’t have them. We are jealous of others who have them. In other words, they are **idols** that we worship. So, this is a perspective problem. We are worshipping horizontally instead of vertically.
         1. And right here, brothers and sisters, we have the recipe for resisting sin. Whether it is pornography or overeating or discontentment, we need to find our ultimate joy and meaning and purpose in Jesus.
         2. One book about battling pornography that I have mentioned to you before is called ‘*captured by a better vision*.’ And the title already is so helpful. To decrease the yearning for forbidden flesh, you must increase your yearning for Jesus. A phone filter and your own efforts to resist, will not do it. And it is the same with every fleshly temptation; the only way to lessen the appeal of the world’s temptations is to increasingly find your satisfaction and joy and fulfillment in Jesus.
         3. A French author, Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood, and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” It’s a powerful illustration, isn’t it! People who have to collect wood to build a boat will find any excuse to not collect wood. But people who yearn to sail on the sea will gladly search for wood and put ours into building the boat and learning how to navigate.
         4. So, a love for Christ and the things of Christ are were resisting sin has to start. And that is why Paul begins Colossians with Christ. He tells us that God “*delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation … And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent*.” And further on in Colossians we read, “*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority … God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins … For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*.”
         5. And only then, having set Christ before us, does Paul go on to explain what seeking things above looks like in practical detail. And so, from 3:5, we see what specific behaviours need to be put off and what specific behaviours need to be put on. And we see how important active participation in a local congregation is for resisting sin. But these things must grow out of love for Christ; thankfulness for Christ; a desire to be more like Christ.
3. So, 3:1*ff* is the right recipe for resisting sin. And this brings us to our third and last passage, which is **1 Peter 1:3-5** (p. 1014). And this is where we see **the reward that awaits forgiven sinners**.
   1. Earlier we spoke about David who described the wonderful blessing that belongs to forgiven sinners. In **Psalm 103:12**, David says, “*As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us*.” In **Isaiah 43:25**, God says, “*I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins*.” Isn’t that amazing!
   2. But the blessing that belongs to the believer is not only the joy of knowing that our sins are forgiven, but also the joy of knowing the future glory that awaits us as forgiven sinners. And this is what **verses 3-5** are about: “*He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* *to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*.” And what these words are about is the doctrine that we call the **perseverance of the saints**. It is the promise of God to bring all those whom He has chosen in eternity past to heaven. And it is expressed here as a promise about a heavenly inheritance that is secure/guaranteed/100% certain for each believer! And what I want you to notice today is the basis for this secure/guaranteed/100% certain promise of a heavenly inheritance.
      1. First of all, according to verse 3, **do we become born again believers by our own ability or strength?** Do we choose to become born again *independent* of God? Is it something *we* do? No. “*He (meaning God) has caused us to be born again.”* So, our salvation has its origins in God, not in ourselves. It begins with God.
         1. And if you look back to verse 1, Peter calls believers “***elect*** *exiles*.” So, our salvation ultimately goes back to God’s electing choice. And it is because He chose us that He causes us to be born again. And there is lot’s more we could say about this, but that is not our focus today. Our key point here is that God caused us to be born again.
      2. And second, according to verse 4, **is our heavenly inheritance dependent on our ability to not sin?** Is it secure only if we are perfect? No. It is “*kept in heaven for you*.” It is God who does the keeping! It depends on God, not on you or how good you are.
         1. Maybe you boys and girls remember receiving some money from your parents when you were really young. And you were allowed to go shopping and spend it. But before you left, Mum or Dad said, give the money to me to look after, because you will probably lose it. And they were right! So, its our money, but it is secure because Mum and dad are looking after it. Well, believer, your heavenly inheritance is secure because God is looking after it!
      3. And third, according to verse 5, **is it up to you to guard your faith?** Is it entirely up to you to persevere in faith in your own strength? No. “*Who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*.” Those God has chosen, He causes to be born again, and He guards in faith. And He causes them to keep resisting sin, and to confess sin when they fall, and to find their rest in Christ, again and again and again, until they go to be with Him or He returns.

So, when you fall into sin, do not despair of God’s grace. That is why the Spirit has given us the stories of people like David; so that we may know that to be a believer is to be a forgiven sinner.

But we must never be happy with sin or think that sin does not matter. In fact we must learn to hate sin, with a passion. And that is why we are given the recipe for resisting sin.

And to keep us from despair when we sin, we are promised a heavenly inheritance, which is secure in God, because of Christ! And this, brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, is wonderful news for weary sinners. Amen.