

A Different Way to Walk in 2011

Preached by Bill Hekman at Calvary Life Fellowship 2 Jan 2011

For eight hours, he prepares his uniform and his mind for duty. Every day of his duty, he gets a fresh haircut. And when he is on duty, he will not vary from his walk a single step, or for a single second, no matter the weather, no matter the hour of the day, no matter the day of the week, no matter the number of people watching, and no matter if no one watches at all. You've seen his picture, of course, for he is the unflinching guard, the sentinel, a member of the **Third United States Infantry Regiment of the United States Army, the men and women who guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery, just outside Washington the capitol of the United States.**

For every minute of every day, since July 2, 1937, the Old Guard has stood guard. And there is nothing casual about the way the work is done Arlington. **When a sentinel comes on duty, he walks exactly 21 steps across the tomb, representing the 21-gun salute, the highest honor given to any military or foreign dignitary. When he turns, he faces the tomb, and remains in that position for 21 seconds. He turns again and walks 21 steps across the tomb. When he completes the short journey, he stops, turns toward the tomb, and pauses for 21 seconds. Over and over, the sentinel repeats the process, until his shift is completed.** When the job is done well, it is nearly impossible to discern any movement of the young soldier's head, or weapon. With an average age of only 22, these young, enlisted men and women, with ranks ranging only from Private First Class to Specialist, prepare for weeks to take a turn at the tomb. They will be assigned to groups by their height. No more than five centimeters will separate those who take responsibility for duty shifts. And yet, somehow, all of the sentinels seem taller, straighter, and a bit prouder. Part of the reason for the ramrod appearance would be from the shoes the soldiers wear. Though they are standard, military issue boots, the heels and soles are built up a bit, not for protection from the weather, but to aid in the walking, the turning, and the distinctive clicking of the heels. Strict training ensures that the guard will be unflinching and unwavering in duty, no matter the heat of summer, no matter the driving rain of December, or the frozen snow of February.

And most importantly of all, the guard will remain posted, and the steps will remain perfect, even when there is not another soul in sight, when no one is watching to see if the sentinel remains diligent at midnight.

Inside the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers at Arlington Cemetery are men who gave their lives for the freedom enjoyed in the United States. Surrounding the Tomb of the Unknowns are more than a quarter of a million graves of others who gave their lives in service for their country. And around that single cemetery are thousands upon

thousands of cemeteries in the United States ... and around the world ... where the bodies are reminders that our freedom isn't free at all. Instead, it came with a fierce and terrible price tag, and **such sacrifice is worth a 24-hour guard, seven days a week, 12 months out of the year.**

You just don't walk the same way when it's your turn to guard the tomb.

Neither should we, as we enter the New Year representing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're embarking on a new year, and our minds are drawn to new commitments, or even fresh versions of previous commitments. Whether your hope for 2011 includes a better way of balancing your budget, or simply finding less of you to balance on your bathroom scales, almost everyone is in a mood to consider change as we have entered the New Year.

We are expected to walk in a different way, once we follow Christ. It doesn't matter if a crowd is watching, or if no one at all is watching. It doesn't matter if the watch is pleasant, or difficult. It doesn't matter about the circumstances, the physical, emotional, or even spiritual strain. **Walking as a follower of Jesus requires a different step than the rest of the world ...**

I pray that you and I will make this year of 2011 a year for standing strong, for standing tall, and for standing proud of the way we represent our Savior. The message from Ephesians chapter 4 is incredibly relevant, despite the fact the words were written nearly 2,000 years ago. The city was a huge city, and a transportation hub. The culture of Ephesus had several similarities with our culture. **Though their technology was different, their weak points were the same. They had a tendency to like sinful practices. They were materialistic. They had sexual practices that left nothing to the imagination, and nothing seemed to shame them.** Ephesus was also a religious center with the great temple of Artemis, 130 by 67 meters in size, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It had 127 columns 20 meters high holding up the roof.

And yet, right in the midst of a very difficult environment, a church sprang up. As Paul ministered to this small group of Christians, it became obvious that people were hungry for something real. They wanted something more than what their money could buy, more than what their lustful imaginations could create. And as they listened, as they considered the life of Jesus, and as they changed their ways, their number began to grow. In fact, so many people in Ephesus came to Christ and began changing their way of living, the economic core of the city based on idol making, was threatened. Change so dramatic came to the town, a riot involving 25,000 or more people broke out, with the writer of this little letter being the focus of the fury. (Acts 18-19 has the full story.)

Eventually, long after he had to rush out of Ephesus in order to save his life, Paul wrote his church with a simple instruction for what he expected of them. He urged them to do what you're probably hoping to do as you have entered a new year. **He called them to a new way of living, or as the guards around the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier might say it, to a new way of walking.**

We read from Ephesians chapter 4 verse 1:

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received. Paul was in and out of prison a lot during the last years of his life, and he may have been in prison when he wrote this letter. Even if not, he was becoming accustomed to life as a prisoner, and he had been imprisoned only because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. He urged them.: "I urge you to walk in a way that honors Christ. I'm begging you to do this!"

I. The way you live has nothing to do with the way you were saved.

Ephesians 2:8-10

"For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation — created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them."

Paul is always careful to remind us that we're saved by grace, and by no other means. You can't avoid enough sins, bake enough pies, make enough hospital visits, read enough Bible, or give enough money to be saved. Just can't. You can't "walk in a way that honors God" and hope that'll be enough to walk your way into heaven. If we haven't accepted the gift of grace, there will be no grace at all.

With Christmas just passed, I suppose most of us have received some Christmas gifts. Or perhaps you say "Pastor I received no Christmas gift from any one". Well, let me remind you of some of the gifts God gave you at this Christmas. The most important one is LIFE! Then there are the gifts of forgiveness from the Lord and love from friends and family. There is long list of gifts from God such as health and strength. Eyes to see, ears to hear a mouth to speak, legs to walk and hands to give ---and receive! As the song says...

*Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

the Lord hath done

The Christmas gift you received was free. It didn't cost you anything. You didn't have to pay taxes on it, and you didn't have to wait in line in an overcrowded store to buy it. You didn't have to pay for shipping, and you didn't even have to wrap it. Your one and only goal in the transaction was receiving and accepting the gift. That's it. That's all.

Receiving the gift of salvation, receiving the ultimate Christmas gift is easy and wonderful. Millions and millions of people believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. **But there's as big a step between receiving Christ and living a life that's worthy of that gift.**

Paul discovered, after he was saved by grace, that through his faith in Christ, he could better control his thoughts, his lusts, his anxiety, his anger, and his feelings of guilt. ... he actually found a freedom from knowing Christ that allowed him to sing while he was in prison! So get it clear right from the start that there's a huge difference between receiving the gift of salvation, and then using that relationship. And your actions in life have nothing to do with how you are saved. Salvation is by grace alone, grace made available only by the death of Jesus on the cross.

The letter to the Ephesians is a letter to Christians, and this message is a message to Christians. Paul says, **"I urge you to walk in a way that's worthy of the calling you have received."** This is a letter to people who've already received the gift.

II. The way we walk is quickly and easily seen in the way we treat other people.

We read from Ephesians 4:1-3, "I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds [us]. Look at the qualities Paul lists immediately, while his instruction to walk in a way that's worthy of your calling are still echoing in the air.

Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Bearing with one another. Loving people. Working hard to keep the unity among believers.

It's pretty simple. When you make an effort to live in a Christ-honoring manner, it immediately affects the people around you. It's a way of living that goes against the grain. It shocks people ... all the humility and gentleness. It stuns people, at the strength they find in such a person.

The people around you come first. Other people get the best portion. People you live with, people you work with, people you study with, play with, hang out with ... they get more than you do. They get more honor. They get more prestige. They get more joy. They might even have more stuff, more money. **It's a lifestyle that says you will be the servant, and they will be the served. The perfect example for all of us is our Lord Jesus Christ Who said "I came to serve not to be served."**

When our church is filled with servants ... miracles are going to happen.

We read in Ephesians 3:20-21, **“Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think —according to the power that works in you— to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”**

The only way this ever happens is through is best called spiritual maturity. A young person, a young adult, can be spiritually mature. An older person can still be a spiritual child, still be horribly immature when it comes to caring more about others than self. Patience isn't a quickly or easily learned trait. Bearing with one another sometimes takes all the effort you've got. And only the strongest is able to succeed. Only the most committed will get it done.

An Admirer once asked Leonard Bernstein, celebrated orchestra conductor, what was the hardest instrument to play. He replied without hesitation: "Second fiddle. I can always get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm or second French horn or second flute, now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony." The only way the church has the harmony it has, is that so many people are willing to serve one another. .

III. The way you walk is completely up to you.

The Bible is making a challenge to you. The way you walk ... the choice of how you live ... is completely up to you.

The circumstances around you, no matter how good, or how bad, cannot control how you react to those circumstances. And therein is exactly what we're focusing upon ... those choices are the “way we walk” and the way we live here in Indonesia in 2011.

A young wife named Jennifer prayed like this:

I pray for ... wisdom to understand my man.

Lord, I pray for Love, to forgive him.

O Lord, I pray for patience, to deal with his moods.

But O Lord, I do not pray for strength, for if you give me strength, I will beat him to death, Amen.

OK. She's making choices. What a great thing it is, when a person makes a choice to walk in a Christ-like way. What an incredible impact it makes. And you know what? The only person in the world who can make that decision for you ... is you!

A married couple was celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary.

At the party everybody wanted to know how they managed to stay married so long in this day and age. The husband responded, "When we were first married, we came to an agreement. I would make all the major decisions, and my wife would make all the minor decisions." At which point the wife took up the tale, "And in 60 years of marriage we have never needed to make a major decision."

Walking in a way that honors Christ may sound like a major decision ... to walk in a way worthy of your calling. But in a sense, this major decision is made with a long series – a lifetime, even – of minor decisions. You just make ‘them one at the time, like one little step at a time, and pretty soon, you’re walking in a brand new way, right into a brand new year of our Lord the year 2011.