

Honoring The One Who Ultimately Rules

I Peter 2:11-17

The last hymn we sang was “This is My Father’s World”. And it doesn’t surprise me that in the hymnal Psalm 24:1 is quoted just beneath the title, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” God’s creation is a part of His glory. I am going to read a Scripture that has at times been misunderstood. The Apostle Paul – when speaking about people who had become hardened to the gospel – says in **II Corinthians 4:4**, “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” The god of this world is referring to Satan.

Now let me pause and tell a story. When I was pastoring a church in California, I invited a minister from another congregation to share in our evening service. He had put together a slide presentation of mountains, flowery meadows, sunsets and a host of other beautiful displays of God’s creation – and he had the hymn “This Is My Father’s World” playing in the background. His goal was to showcase God’s glory through His creation. I was shocked when a couple from my church looked at each other and angrily declared, “This isn’t God’s world! It is Satan’s world!”

Let’s go back to what Paul says II Corinthians 4:4. The god of this world is Satan, but the world Paul is referring to is the “world system” – not the mountains and flowery meadows of planet earth. Satan is god only over what he has created – and the only thing in the universe Satan has created is the “world system” – which is a way of thinking and a set of values that are in opposition to the rightful ruler of the earth – and that is

God. Satan's "world system" appeals to our flesh, our self-centered natures – which operate apart from God. This is why **I John 2:16** says,

“For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world [referring to the world system devised by Satan].”

Can all of you name the three major enemies of God and mankind listed in the Bible? They are: the world, the flesh and the devil. Satan's "world system" assures us that we can be happy – apart from God. Our fleshly natures urge us to seek pleasure – apart from God. And believe it or not, one of Satan's goals, is to make people religious – apart from God. This is why he often masquerades as an angel of light. Satan loves it when people try to earn their salvation through man-made strategies, because as long as people think that way, they will miss heaven and end up in hell. With these thoughts in mind, let's now read I Peter 2:11, which focuses on one of our enemies,

“Beloved [Peter is reminding his brothers and sisters in Christ that they are loved by God], I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”

Did you notice the titles Peter assigns to his fellow Christians? He refers to us as sojourners and exiles. To understand why, we need to go back to Abraham, the father of faith, who the Bible refers to as a sojourner in the land of Canaan. Abraham was never a citizen of that country, nor did he own any land, except for a plot of ground in which to bury his wife Sarah and himself. Please listen to **Genesis 23:1-6**,

“Sarah lived 127 years . . .² And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah

and to weep for her [Abraham's tears were for himself, not Sarah].³ And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites,⁴ 'I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you [name your price] for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.'⁵ The Hittites answered Abraham,⁶ 'Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs.'"

Abraham wanted he and Sarah to be buried in Canaan because God promised to give that land to their descendants. Why do you suppose God chose that particular land? One of the reasons was because it was located in a highly traveled trade area, which would hopefully enable Abraham's descendants to influence peoples from many nations to follow the true and living God. That has always been God's plan.

And so there is a sense where Abraham lived his life not for earthly benefits that he would personally experience, but for the benefit of his descendants, who according to God's promise, would be a blessing to all the nations. Abraham's goal in life was not to grab all the gusto he could get. He lived a life guided by God's values – which caused him to care deeply about people and to live in a way that benefitted others. And that kind of living did not go unnoticed by the Hittites, who referred to him as a **prince of God**.

There is also another aspect to Christians being sojourners and exiles. These titles should remind us that this world **as it is now**, is not our permanent home. We are just passing through. James says that our lives are but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. How many people here – who are in your 70's and 80's and 90's – think that is true? It really does go by quickly. But one day all of God's people

will live on a **New Earth** with glorified bodies that never get sick, never get old and never die. We are told in **Hebrews 11:9-10**, that this certain hope was always in Abraham's mind,

“By faith he went to live in the land of promise [Canaan], as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

Because Christians have so much to look forward to, we can afford to be generous and sacrificial now. Friends, these flesh and blood bodies are going to return to the dust from which they were made. It is our souls that go on living and one day will be clothed with glorified bodies. And so why should we live only to please only our flesh, which is temporary – and not live for the benefit of our eternal souls?

Today we tend to view “sins of the flesh” as sexual sins, but in the Bible, it is much broader than that. Look back at verse 1, “So put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.” All of those are “sins of the flesh” – and all sins of the flesh have one thing in common – they are focused on the unholy trinity, “Me, Myself and I”. A pastor in Chicago refers to a man whose T-Shirt read, “**Just worship me and we will get along fine.**” What a dead end philosophy. And we don't have to wait until we die or until Christ bodily returns to raise the dead – in order to discover that. Listen now to I Peter 2:12,

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles [unbelievers] **honorable**, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Christians are to live in such a way, that our goodness discredits those

who speak against us. We can only live this way by the power of the Holy Spirit. What did Peter mean when he spoke of unbelievers, who were speaking evil against Christians, reversing themselves and glorifying God on the day of visitation? The Bible gives us many examples of “days of visitation”. Let me share an example from the Old Testament and an example from the New Testament. **Ezekiel 9:1-6**, speaks about a day of visitation – which was in the prophet Ezekiel’s near future. In this visitation, God would revealed His wrath against the wicked and His pleasure with the righteous. As I read, notice where this day of visitation took place,

“Then he [the LORD] cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, ‘Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.’² And behold, six men [angels] came . . . each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man [another angel] clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist . . .⁴ And the LORD said to him, ‘Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it’ [these were righteous people].⁵ And to the others [the six angels of destruction] he said in my hearing, ‘Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity.⁶ Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark.’”

Does that judgment seem harsh? Its severity stemmed from what God told us about that generation of Jews in Ezekiel 5:6. They were actually more wicked than all the pagan nations that surrounded them. And even in spite of that, before the army of Babylon showed up, God graciously warned the Jewish people, through the prophet Jeremiah, to voluntarily surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. The people who listened, such as Daniel

and his three friends, received God's angelic mark on their foreheads. These people were not only spared, but their righteous lives caused many unbelieving Babylonians to glorify God. In contrast, the Jewish people who refused to listen to God's Word – ended up being killed or forcefully carried off into exile by the Babylonians.

When I Peter was being written, the people of Judah and the city of Jerusalem were once again about to experience a day of visitation, because of their stubborn rejection of Christ and their persecution against His followers. Jesus had warned of this visitation in **Luke 19:41-44**,

“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace [Christ was presenting Himself as their Savior and King – but He wasn't the kind of savior and king they wanted – and so they rejected Him]! But now they [the truths that lead to peace] are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’”

The Jews who rejected Christ and His words, were horribly judged. The Jews who embraced Christ were delivered from this judgment by doing what Jesus told them to do in **Luke 21:20-22**,

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city **depart**, and let **not** those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.”

How would this horrible judgment cause unbelievers to glorify God?

Years ago a “Jews for Jesus” staff person shared with me some of the writings from rabbis who survived the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. With a deep sense of awe – these rabbis testified that everything Jesus said would happen to Israel – happened – in just the way Jesus said. The Encyclopedia Judaica, a Jewish publication, reports that the first Jews to return to Jerusalem after its destruction, were the Christian Jews who had obeyed what Christ prophesied and fled. They did not return to gloat about Jerusalem’s destruction. They came to weep with their Jewish brothers. Many unbelieving Jews at that time discovered that Christians are not evil people. They are people who care about others.

What Peter writes in verses 13-14 can be shocking in light of **when** he wrote it [A.D. 62-64],

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”

When Peter wrote these words, the emperor of the Roman empire was Nero. How could Peter command Christians to honor Nero? We need to be aware that when Peter wrote this, Nero had not begun to persecute Christians. That did not take place until after the fire of Rome in July of A.D. 64. Actually, the first five years of Nero’s rule [A.D. 54-59] are referred to as the golden years. This was because Nero, who came to the throne at the age of 16 or 17, was not the actual ruler. It was Seneca and Burrus – and they were honest, skilled statesmen, who moved the Roman Empire back toward its republic roots and just laws.

I pray that Christians today become more and more aware that God's purpose for civil government, the task He has given it to do, is to restrain evil and promote peace and order by punishing wrong doers and praising those who do what is right. Of course we must ask ourselves, who defines what is good and what is evil? The proper answer is: God does. And we are in serious trouble if we believe that civil leaders determine what is good or evil – or that 51% of the voters do. God's Moral Law is the standard of right and wrong – which is why our Supreme Court Building in Washington D.C. – has the Ten Commandments written on both the outside and the inside of that building.

When Peter wrote that Christians are to be subject to civil rulers, he did not mean that we must always obey everything they say. If civil rulers forbid us to do what God commands, or command us to do what God forbids, then we must obey God rather than man. One such command that the Roman Empire invoked, and which Christians could not obey, was the requirement that all people under Roman rule were to pour out a cup of wine and declare that "Caesar is Lord". To follow that command would violate God's Law. Friends, whenever man's civil laws are in conflict with God's Law, bad things happen. This is why **Proverbs 16:12** says, "It is an abomination for kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness."

I rejoice that Christians are praying together for God to grant repentance and revival to our nation for the things we are doing against God's will. Praise God, the United States has done a lot of things right

and still does many good things – but if our evil is not repented of, our nation will not last. When Nero started soaking Christians in wax and setting them on fire, his days as king ended shortly. Let’s finish by reading verses 15-17,

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

God’s will for Christians is that we do good. We are **not saved** by doing good, but we are saved **so that we can do good** by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the good that we do, must be good – as defined by God. We presently have some civil leaders who are saying that it is a God-given, constitutional right for women to abort their babies for any and every reason. No, it is not. Are we to hate all women who have had abortions? No. This is why our church supports works such as Carenet and the Pregnancy Information Center. These are places where women who are pregnant out of wedlock can go and be loved and helped to do the right things.

In verse 16, Peter says we are to live as people who are free, but never use freedom to do what is wrong. It has been said that **morality** is having the character to do what you should do, instead of what you have the freedom to do [such as throwing a big hizzy fit for not getting your way]. Embracing Christ’s Lordship and keeping His commands – out of a heart of love and gratitude, make us the freest of all people. Following the motto, “If it feels good – do it” will lead a person into bondage. Seneca,

the famous Greek philosopher, who tutored Nero, said “**No one is free, who is a slave to his body.**” Nero was a slave to his body.

How are we doing Christians? Are we enslaved to our tempers, or to lust, or to coveting what belongs to others? In **I Corinthians 9:27** the Apostle Paul said, “. . . I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” It is hard to help someone out of a miry pit – if we too are in that pit.

In verse 17, Peter closes with four commands: Honor everyone [because all people are made in God’s image]. Love the brotherhood [because all Christians share the same Holy Spirit and are members of God’s eternal family]. Fear God [because His opinion of us – is the only one that counts]. Honor the emperor [because his God-given task is to restrain evil and promote good – which enables law abiding citizens to enjoy peace and order]. Before you take communion this morning, ask yourself how you are doing in living out what this passage teaches? Let’s pray.