

Sunday 27th June 2021

Ye servants of God, your master proclaim: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GH0aLQwhRY>

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring for ever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Matthew 13:44-46

⁴⁴ "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again, and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl.

Hymns:

As the deer pants for the water : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY0t6_V1OqQ

Lord you are more precious than silver: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ8sCAYzieE>

1 Peter 2:11-25 (GNT)

¹¹ I appeal to you, my friends, as strangers and refugees in this world! Do not give in to bodily passions, which are always at war against the soul. ¹² Your conduct among the heathen should be so good that when they accuse you of being evildoers, they will have to recognize your good deeds and so praise God on the Day of his coming.

¹³ For the sake of the Lord submit yourselves to every human authority: to the Emperor, who is the supreme authority, ¹⁴ and to the governors, who have been appointed by him to punish the evildoers and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For God wants you to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people by the good things you do. ¹⁶ Live as free people; do not, however, use your freedom to cover up any evil, but live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Respect everyone, love other believers, honour God, and respect the Emperor.

¹⁸ You servants must submit yourselves to your masters and show them complete respect, not only to those who are kind and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ God will bless you for this, if you endure the pain of undeserved suffering because you are conscious of his will. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you endure the beatings you deserve for having done wrong? But if you endure suffering even when you have done right, God will bless you for it. ²¹ It was to this that God called you, for Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, and no one ever heard a lie come from his lips. ²³ When he was insulted, he did not

answer back with an insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but placed his hopes in God, the righteous Judge. ²⁴ Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed. ²⁵ You were like sheep that had lost their way, but now you have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of your souls.

Sermon part 1

Our reading from 1 Peter begins at verse 11 & 12. Many bibles have section headings in them – these are designed to help us navigate our way through, but they are not in themselves part of the scripture (and different versions use different headings and can limit our view or expectations – (e.g. we know the heading “the prodigal son” but by calling it that, are we more inclined to miss the key to the story, of the forgiveness of a loving father?) 1 Peter 2:11-12 are sometimes grouped differently – The Good News Translation prefaces verse 11 with “slaves of God”, whilst the New International Version keeps them with verses 4-10 as part of a “The living stone and a chosen people”, and heads 13 onwards as “submission to rulers and masters”.

But I want to look at these verses in a 3rd way – not as part of before or after what comes in this chapter, but in the light of verse 1 of chapter 1. Peter was writing to the “scattered” - Christians spread across the region including the area covered by modern-day Turkey – Christians probably from both the dispersed Jewish population and Gentiles. But whether Jew or Gentile, they were now “different” as Christians. And this is the point being made in verse 11 – whether they were exiled Jews in a foreign land or not, their acceptance of the gospel made them aliens in the land they lived in, and indeed in the world. They are no longer of the land they live in, but have a heavenly citizenship – heirs to God’s kingdom. But they are to bear witness to this in the land in which they live. Edmund Clowney says “Christians are therefore called to set about living as strangers with a mission. They are ambassadors on earth, revering their Father in heaven.”

And the use of the word ambassadors is interesting and helpful: we know that embassies are “little bits of their own land” in an alien setting (causing all sorts of issues about diplomatic immunity!) The case last year of Anne Sacoolas, suspected of causing the death of a young man by driving on the wrong side of the road, but claiming diplomatic immunity and returning the USA, highlights that it is necessary to conform to the laws of the land in which you are living. If we go abroad on holiday, we may learn a few words of the language, try the food, but we do not live as they live, adopting culture and language. My niece, teaching in a school in Qatar for a couple of years, was not expected or required to live as a muslim woman, but she was expected to respect their laws.

We, as Christians, aliens in the world, are called to live in such a way as to be an example to others.

The Message puts verses 11-12 this way: *Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cosy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life among the natives so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.*

Peter is concerned about the witness of the Christian church to the pagans, the heathen, the natives of the land you are in. We are to be ambassadors, rejecting conformity, yet accepting responsibility, living as law-abiding citizens and honouring rulers and fellow residents.

And why? Because that is how we will win souls for Christ.

From the Message, above:

Live an exemplary life among the natives refute their prejudices. .. they'll be won over to God's side.

This letter, 1 Peter, has a format of summary followed by detail. In these two verses we have had an instruction as to what we should do. The next section helps to unpack how we should do that, which is our main focus today.

Prayer: God, you did not stay remote in heaven, but chose to come in the person of Jesus to live among us. Jesus, when you walked this earth, you did not socialise in a holy huddle, but moved amongst the people who needed you most. Holy Spirit, you come to make us more like Jesus.

Help us as we study your word, to understand what it is that you ask of us, and desire for us. Amen.

162 From heaven you came (Servant king) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpwfDXcKrNQ>

Sermon part 2

Let's look first at verses 13 and 17.

submit yourselves to every human authority: to the Emperor, ¹⁴ and to the governors, ¹⁷ Respect everyone,, and respect the Emperor. (just in case you thought "everyone" didn't include the emperor!)

MSG ¹³⁻¹⁷ Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.

What does it mean to respect the government? Does that mean we should quietly go along with everything they propose? If so, then CND protestors of the 1980s, or more recently the fracking protestors, or the Brexit "remain" campaigners, are not respecting the government? And what about Extinction Rebellion?

Or is it more to do with respecting their position and authority, without necessarily agreeing with them? There were Christians on both sides of the trenches in WWI. Or in more recent times, the Falklands and Iraq conflicts – Thatcher and Blair (I'm trying to be politically unbiased) both resulted in loss of life and the justification for the action has been questioned. We may not agree with the action, but how should we treat the person if they walked in to the room? Respect, due deference, submission – should be given to the person, as human being created by God in His image; but not exalted because of the position they hold.

Titus 3:1-2 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.

But this is all too cosy..... what do these verses mean for persecuted Christians in North Korea? Verse 14 says "the Governors, who have been appointed by God". Is Kim Jong Un appointed by God? Are all leaders God-appointed? Or is it that they are God-permitted – that God allows them to hold the positions they have. After all, God is all powerful, God could send a tidal wave, a plague, a bolt of lightning, to strike them down (there are plenty of examples in the OT where it appears that God has taken decisive action with an individual).

Peter is, here, telling these communities of Christians (whether they were indigenous gentiles or dispersed Jews) that, just as the Jews learned to live within the gentile lands, now both sides, united in their Christian faith but consequently aliens in the land, must show loyalty to the existing Roman government.

Is he saying we should always give in, and be subservient? If we look at verse 14, Peter is careful to set out why we should respect them.

Submit yourselves to .. the Emperor, and to the governors, who have been appointed by him [this is, God] to punish the evildoers and to praise those who do good.

We are called to respect that which is secular, but consistent with a godly perspective of justice. It does not say that we show throw in the towel of our faith in order to be trampled on by evil doers. Look at Daniel – what did he do when commanded to pray only to the king? He prayed to God. He didn't brag to the king that he was going to disobey, he just went to quietly continue doing what he knew to be right. And what happened? God ultimately used his disobedience to show the power of God in closing the lion's mouths, and brought glory to God's name.

¹⁵ *God wants you to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people by the good things you do*
That's true – but ultimately it is God who does the silencing through us – our action is merely the channel for God's work.

We are called to act in godly ways – according to His word and the guidance of His spirit in us.

That's not always easy: should we use leather or plastic for seat coverings? The animal exploitation versus the environment..... v 17 tells us to respect everyone. Do all Christians show respect to all other people?

We need to remember where this letter started. Peter has gone to considerable lengths to remind us that the starting point is Jesus. It's all about Jesus. God among us. God sacrificed for us that we can be forgiven. God raised to life that we might have hope.

Commentary says:

It is the privilege of those who are sons and daughters of the Most High to imitate the magnificence of their Father's mercy. They rise above simple justice to reflect God's goodness and love. Unthreatened by evil, they can overcome evil with good, and in the midst of suffering show mercy to those who would show no mercy toward them.

And elsewhere:

Called as children of light, Christians are free. Their freedom, however, binds them to their calling. They are free in bondage to God. They are free to love their fellow Christians. ... They are also free to honour unbelievers as God's creatures, and to respect the role of authority given to each one.

In the song "Jesus, we celebrate your victory" it says:

It was for freedom, that Christ has set us free. No longer to be subject to a yoke of slavery. So we're rejoicing, in God's victory, our hearts responding to his love.

And that is such a key point, which is so easily overlooked. So..... responding. We have to respond. We have to give a response to the gifts of grace, mercy and hope that we have been given – we cannot fully receive them unless we respond to them by showing our gratitude. But gratitude has to be appropriate, relevant, and sincere. And God has given us a simple blueprint for how it is appropriate to show gratitude.

Jesus said: *love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.*

God IS love. God has loved us beyond comprehension. And we should love in return – showing that love to others. But love is costly. And the later verses of this chapter go on to talk about suffering. v20 points out that there is no virtue in suffering (i.e. receiving punishment) for what we have done

wrong – that is simply justice. No, the blessing comes as a consequence of suffering not for our sake, but for God’s sake – suffering for doing right.

“That’s unfair” cries the world. But Peter says (v21 onwards) “it was to this that God called you”.

Suffering is our calling – which is not the same as saying it is our fate. It is not a “you will suffer” to which we need stoic resignation, but a “you may”. And suffering is not simply meek resignation either (though it can appear that way to others) – it is a strong and powerful action, a positive decision, even when done in silence. Remember silence

Is 53:7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

Jesus did not retaliate (we see his lack of response to Pilate’s questioning in the gospels).

Commentary: Humility is not slavish subjection to others. Rather, it is modelled on the humility of the Lord. Jesus willingly endured humiliation, because God has exalted him. God indeed calls us to humility, but he has already joined us to Christ’s exaltation. Our humility is the free and willing service of a royal people.

Let’s see how the MSG puts it:

21-25 This is the kind of life you’ve been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step.

He never did one thing wrong, not once said anything amiss.

*They called him every name in the book and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, **content to let God set things right**. He used his servant body to carry our sins to the Cross so we could be rid of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing. You were lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you’re named and kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls.*

The song “Above all powers” says this:
*Above all powers above all kings
Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began*

*Above all kingdoms above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There’s no way to measure what You’re worth*

*Crucified laid behind a stone
You lived to die rejected and alone
Like a rose trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me
Above all*

Jesus went to the cross, suffered, because of me. And who is writing this? This is Peter who lied in order not to follow Jesus to the cross – who now realises that the suffering is the way to glory.

Everything has been dealt with: all our sin and failure has been taken away. Jesus has brought us life. If we have any fear, it should not be in the wrath of men, but the wrath of God if we do not give him the honour that he deserves.

We have been healed, bought back. Why are we not excited about this? What is our response to this? How will we live as a consequence of this? Do we treat this as a pearl of greatest worth? We have a treasure that is beyond all comprehension in its value – we have an eternal inheritance as heirs to God's kingdom in life everlasting. Are we prepared to give our all and, enduring what comes our way, stay true to the example we are called to follow in Jesus?

663 The price is paid <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB3-6yuqqhA>

Grace