

A New People for an Old Message: A Study in 1 Peter, 1 Peter 2:9-12,

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on May 10th, 2009

"Those that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted!"

2 Timothy 3:12

Intro

I think as American Christians we assume certain rights and entitlements, and one of them is comfort and freedom from persecution. We have even created a theology of health and wealth to support the spurious notion that God wants you healthy, wealthy and wise. This is in spite of the repeated exhortations that "*Those that live a godly life in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted*" (**2 Timothy 3:12**). "Doesn't God love us?" Yes He does, but Satan doesn't, and the world's system of thought is contrary to God's. Christians have been persecuted since their inception. All 12 of the disciples were persecuted and ultimately killed for their faith¹ (Strengthening the notion that the resurrection must have been real to them).

Peter is addressing a people who have felt the sting of false accusations and mean spirited rhetoric from influential Roman citizens and statesmen.² He is exhorting them to live as "Aliens and sojourners," recognizing that this isn't their kingdom, and that they are representatives of their own and will always find themselves as "Resident Aliens" in a strange world.

I believe more than ever these words ring true for our own culture. We are dismayed because of the onslaught of anti-Christian rhetoric and popular Atheism that has ostensibly struck a damaging blow into the hull of Christianities sinking ship; but men like Voltaire and Nietzsche have made these bold claims since the dawn of the Christian sect, and even though they do damage to feeble minds, they do not destroy the will of God, nor are they outside of His sovereign gaze. Peter wants us to understand our new identity in Christ, and help us realize that persecution, and lies, and false accusations are synonymous with our proclamation that Jesus is Lord. Our story is an exclusivist one that has always been seen as arrogant and elitist position. It's a comprehensive worldview purporting to answer the questions of human dilemma. In our postmodern, relativistic age that believes the only true sin is "Absolutism," it is downright heresy, and the powerful desire to burn anyone with such bold claims at the proverbial stake!

From the Head...

A New Identity (1 Peter 2:9a)

The last few verses (See especially **1 Peter 2:7**), that we looked at last week remind us that those who disobey the word, by rejecting Him (Jesus, the True Word) will stumble, and be offended by the gospel. It is foolishness to them (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). In verse nine he gives us reasons that this is different for those that believe because those that believe have an entirely new identity, which gives the believer another perspective in regards to God and Jesus.

This is a foundational aspect of the gospel. We are made new in Christ (See **1 Corinthians 5:17**), and we have been given a new identity. We no longer are identified merely by our gender, race, heritage, nation, job, etc. In Christ He has obliterated any division that man has generated as a result of sin (See **Ephesians 2: 12-16**). In verse nine Peter reminds us that our race, occupation and national origin are all stripped as absolute identifying markers as we are now God's holy possession, and made into one new group (**Ephesians 2:15**). We are a new kind of humanity that are formed in Jesus and exist to point to what God has done in Christ. Verse nine gives us four different symbols that highlight the way we are changed in Christ:

1. "*Chosen Race*" (Eklekton Genos) Note we aren't a "Choice" race, but a "Chosen" one. This is humbling and the antithesis of elitism. **Ephesians 2:15** gives us insight into this verse, as does **Isaiah 43:20**. It is interesting that Peter uses this imagery, since it is true of our physical race. We had no choice in where we were born, and who we were born to. In Christ, we are born into another race of people. We can no longer be identified by our physical race, but the fact that we are of another race in Jesus.

2. "*Royal Priesthood*" (Basileon Hierateuma) We are all "Priests," subsequently we have been given a new occupation and are not identified by our vocation or status. As priests, we are all called to intercede for man (See **Hebrews 7:25**). Priests were also responsible for worship, and helping the people properly worship and atone for their sins. Certainly we don't atone for anyone, or make real sacrifices, but we are called to intercede for one another and to show the way in worship of God in Spirit and truth. Our occupation doesn't define us. We are redefined as Priests in God's "Holy Temple" (**1 Peter 2:5**). Peter writes this as he is thinking about **Exodus 19:6** (cf. **Revelation 1:6; 5:10**) and redefines the church

¹ John was exiled and boiled in oil and died of natural causes, while the remaining eleven were martyred.

² There was a satirical inscription found of a donkey being crucified as a mockery of the Christian notion of their Lord being killed on a cross.

as God's people. This was written to refer to God's people in the Old Testament. In Exodus it was connected to obedience to the law (see **19:5**), but now we are a royal priesthood and a holy nation because of what God has done in Christ for us.

3. *"Holy Nation"* (Hagion Ethnos) We are no longer defined by our national heritage or the nations we live in, but redefined as an ambassador of God's kingdom (See **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** cf. **1 Peter 2:11a**). Again, this is reminiscent of **Exodus 19:6** and is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. No one has a right of claim over God, theology, salvation or spiritual growth. No nation, culture, race has it "Right." Only in Christ is humanity being pieced together to do what it was created to do; worship the one that created us (**Isaiah 43:21**)!! What started as Jewish religion was now (In Christ) exploded out to the nations!!

4. *"A People For His Own Possession"* (Laos Eis Peripoimasin) God has always chosen a people for Himself. That was His purpose at creation (**Genesis 1-2**), and this is what He did with the calling of Abraham (**Genesis 12:1-3**) and his descendants (**Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18**). We are His possession for His purposes, and this is possible because of Christ's work on the cross on our behalf!

A New Purpose (1 Peter 2:9b)

"That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him." The significance of this phrase is huge; like **Revelation 5:9, 10; 7:9**, we are reminded of our missionary God who has always intended to bring the nations together under His "New World Order." There will always be a counterfeit creation of a humanist New World Order, where He is absent, and seen as evil, but it is doomed to fail, because He is sovereign, and it will always aim at a self centered prize that will continue to frustrate and create the problems that mitigate peace on earth.

The word *"Excellencies"* (Aretas) is a rare word with a long history of meanings. In our context it is best understood as either "Moral Excellence," or "Praises." We are called throughout scripture to sing His praises. The goal of our witness (Which is the task of the church; see **Acts 1:8**) is not conversation, but a proclaiming of His name. The churches attempts to convert have often fallen into the trap the world systems use to convert, which is power and influence. The NT teaches us that the gospel itself is the *"Power of God unto salvation,"* and it is our role to proclaim His story in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.

A New Motivation (1 Peter 2:9c-10)

Our motivation is that we have a changed identity because we have a changed status before God. We were once in darkness and not a people under His mercy, but a people under His wrath and judgment (See **Ephesians 2:12-13; Romans 5:9**). Again this grace is not appreciated until we truly understand the predicament we were in before Christ paid for our sin. God had every right to justly punish us for our rebellion against Him, the creator, but because of the love by which He loves us, he sent His Son to take our place in order to demonstrate His righteousness, and save us from sure destruction. This part of the story is often dismissed as a heinous scare tactic *"foisted on young children by middle-aged virgins."*³ Many see it as a horrible thing to say, which it would be if it were not true. It certainly would not be horrible to warn a community that a great flood would destroy their homes and take their lives if in fact the flood was absolute. As a matter of fact, officials often warn and evacuate communities based on the possibility of imminent danger, and many are grateful for the choice to adhere the warnings, or take its consequences. If God is righteous to justly punish, and that punishment is imminent, then it is not immoral to tell the story, it is our moral responsibility. In this verse, it's not so much a warning of imminent danger, but a revealing of the excellent beauty of our savior against all other "Saviors."

A New Kingdom (1 Peter 2:11a)

God's people have often been outcast and wanderers in this world (**Matthew 10:22; 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 6:22; 1 Timothy 3:12**). Our kingdom is not of this world, but is eternal, which frees us up to sacrifice and serve this present kingdom.

A New Law (1 Peter 2:11b-12)

The cross of Christ does not abolish the law, but fulfills it (**Matthew 5:17**). We can't gain God's acceptance through obedience to the law, but God accepts us, so that we can obey him (See **John 3:36; Acts 5:32; Romans 6:16; 1 John 2:3**). Obedience includes abstaining *"From the passions (Epithumia) of the flesh"* (See **Romans 6:16**). It is our desires and appetites that can destroy us if they aren't placed under the sovereignty of our Lord, and often end up harming others (**James 4:1-2**). We are created to have our "Desires" met in Jesus; yet, He has created us to enjoy our appetites within a God glorifying rubric. It is when we feed our desires as the ultimate source of joy and satisfaction that we become enslaved and addicted to things that are meant to be enjoyed, but not idolized.

We aren't made to be stoic and passionless; nor are we made to try and completely eradicate our passions and desires, but we are told to abstain from those things that *"Wage war against your soul."* When we don't there is a twofold effect on

³ Christopher Hitchens referring to Catholic nuns in a debate with Alister McGrath

us. One, when we don't put to death the desires of the flesh, they will ultimately kill us personally, and secondly, it has a corporate effect in the culture we live, and it kills our witness with non-believers.

The fact remains that those that don't believe will always hate us, and we will be falsely accused of many things, but Peter exhorts believers to live in such a way that they don't have any real charges against us. And what Peter says in verse twelve is interesting. It actually has two potential meanings centered on the phrase "*Day of visitation.*" This phrase can mean either "Day of their conversion," or "The day when Christ returns in judgment." If the first possibility is true, then it could have the meaning that the result of Christians glorifying God is the conversion of the gentiles into the faith (See **1 Peter 3:1**); however it is much more plausible in the context to take this verse to mean that the non-believer will recognize their error in accusing believers unjustly at their judgment, which is common in other biblical verses (**Isaiah 10:3; Exodus 32:34; Jeremiah 6:15; 10:15; 11:23**). Peter also seems to foresee the coming judgment on an unbelieving world (**2:15, 23; 3:9-12; 4:5, 17**). Also Peter in a similar verse (**3:16**) clearly states that those "*Who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame,*" which again points to the idea that those that see the "Good" works, will continue to revile, and subsequently be judged. Either way, we are called to do good works in order to proclaim God's glory to a dead world for either their conversion or judgment. What this tells us is that we are to do "Good" in spite of the results or the reaction of the people we are serving.

...to the Heart

This passage is here to remind the believers that this world will never be our friend. We who cling to it, are not aware of the beauty of the Lord, and have accepted a poor substitute. Believers will always be persecuted, but Peter reminds us that this persecution needs to be void of human reasons for it, as we are called to love and serve our fellow man in spite of their treatment of us.

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