

1 Peter 2:11-17 How I learned to stop worrying and support Obama

sermonaudio.com

Peter

By Ricky Jones

Bible Text: 1 Peter 2:11-17

Preached on: Sunday, November 15, 2009

Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

10616 E 100th St

Tulsa, OK 74133

Website: www.redeemertulsa.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/redeemertulsa

Let's turn to the Lord in prayer. We are on 1 Peter chapter two. And you look in your bulletin where you can read along with me.

1 Peter chapter two beginning with verse 11.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.¹

It was in God's providence—of course everything is in God's providence—but it was a convenient providence that Mike and Susan were going to come up here today because it gives me a chance to tell you why I am not a missionary. The long and short of it is I am bad at it. I am a bad traveler. I have done some... I have gone two mission trips and I think I can resolutely say that two of the worst weeks I have had as far as just kind of physical.

The last trip I had was in Peru. It was in Cusco and when you land in Cusco Peru you land at an altitude of about 12,000 feet. That is where you land. That is the low point. That is twice Denver. And I get headaches in Denver.

¹ 1 Peter 2:11.

So you are walking through the airport and one of the first things you see is this room full of oxygen tents. And that is for people who just can't take it. They can't get enough oxygen in their lungs at that altitude. They put them in a oxygen tent until the next plane out and they put them on the next plane out.

And I will be honest with you. As I saw those, I thought about it. I made the wrong decision and stayed. I went through about 36 hours of altitude sickness, felt just awful, could not get out of bed. And that was the high point of the trip. I dehydrated. My clothes got lost. My luggage got lost by the airlines which was actually my fault and the students began saying... they summarized the trip by saying this. "Ricky's clothes arrived on Wednesday and his brain arrived on Friday."

I just couldn't think. I couldn't... I wasn't present with everybody.

To make things worse, you know, the accommodations weren't exactly the Marriot spa. The food, the kitchen smelled like decaying onions because it was filled with decaying onions and that kind of made everything including the water taste a little bit like onions.

And the shower, these weren't luxury accommodations. We had a hot shower. The water was heated by something called a widow maker. What happened was you had this trickle of water that would come over a little electric current that would heat the water as it poured over it. You could probably guess. The reason why it was called a widow maker was because if you are standing in water and you touch the current you would die.

And so, but we did have warm trickles of water coming down our backs. And I was glad to get home.

But, you know, the funny thing is this. The trip was miserable, but we had funny stories about it and I am glad I did it. And we had two students go back and spend the whole summer in that place and a lot of students get a vision for missions and go into the ministry from it. It was a valuable, valuable time even though it was miserable.

But, you know, it was ok it was miserable because we weren't there permanently, because that place wasn't home and because we weren't there to be comforted. We weren't there to be served. We were there to help other people. We were there to serve.

The apostle Peter tells us that our stay here in this temporary place we call earth is much the same. As a church, as God's people we are resident aliens. We are not from here. And the purpose of our time here is not for us to comfort ourselves and kind of force the world into a comfortable place for us. The purpose of our time here is to serve. It is to serve the culture around us. Our primary citizenship is in heaven.

What Peter says to us we studied last week that you are a chosen race. You are a new people. You are God's people. And he says, therefore, if you are a Christian, the most important thing about you is not that you are an American or not that you are a

Southerner or not that you are a Jones or a Bradford or a Hall or whatever you are. The most important thing about you is that you are a Christian, that you are in Christ.

Though we reside in the world, we are completely different from the world. And we live to serve this world that we find so different.

That is Peter's point for us today. We live in this world, but we are not one of them. We are resident, we are aliens. We are sojourners. We are exiles. We live here, but we are not from here. That is the way Christians in the early world were thought.

There was a Roman historian named Suetonius. I probably said that wrong, too, but you don't know how that one is supposed to be said. Suetonius said that Christians were a class of people animated by a novel and mischievous disposition. He said that Christians weren't even humans. They are a new genus, a new species. They don't fit any category. And he said that for 10 reasons.

He said these Christians disapprove of the violent, bloody games, the gladiatorial games. They disapprove of Caesar's wars of conquest. They disapprove of abortion and infanticide. They empower women. Women in the churches were given roles and given things to do. They were treated as equals. These Christians believed in absolute truth. That wasn't common in that culture. Everything was true and you could believe, like follow Hippocrates or someone else thinking that truth is always changing.

They believed that Jesus was the only true God and the only way of heaven. Nobody in that culture thought that. Everybody had their own temple. And it was ok as long as you went to a temple. It was good.

But to say that this is the only way to heaven was ridiculous, uncalled for, unexpected.

Christians mixed classes and races. That was terribly scandalous. It would have Greeks and Romans and Africans and Barbarians together in the same room eating at the same table. You would have slaves and nobility sitting at the same table. It was scandalous.

Christians had radical plans to help the poor. They actually helped the poor instead of ushering them into slavery.

Christians disapproved of premarital sex which was... or extra marital sex which was unheard of in a culture where you worshipped Aphrodite and other goddesses by having sex with the prostitutes in the temple.

And Christians disapproved of homosexuality which was just a standard mark of right of passage in the Greek world especially.

I think about that list. It is not Roman. There is no conquest. There is no indulgence in the flesh. It is not Greek. There is no indulgence of the arrogant mind. It didn't fit.

And Suetonius said, “They are not humans if they are like that. They don’t fit any category we know.”

The interesting thing is I think that is a pretty accurate description of what Christians ought to be like. Can you think of any other list that doesn’t fit, lists that are very important for us today? Is this a liberal list?

Some of these things are liberal. They don’t approve of violent games. They don’t approve of wars and conquests, elevate women, help the poor. Some of them are pretty liberal.

But some of them are pretty conservative. Disapprove of abortion, disapprove of sexual immorality, believe in absolute truth, believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

What is it? Is this a liberal list or a conservative list? I need to know what kind of church am I in today? What flavor are you?

It doesn’t fit, does it?

Peter tells us and what was true 2000 years ago is still true today. Christians, true, biblical Christians are a nation set apart, a different race and world within the world. And if we are able to understand our role in this world, we have to keep a difficult tension and it is a tension that has been lost both by the liberal and the conservative churches. We are to be in the world. Jesus says this in John 17. His believers are to be in the world, but not of the world. And he has left us in the world so that through us the world could believe in him.

We are in it. We live here amongst these people. but we are not like them. And yet we are not like them in a way, not in a way that is in opposition, but we serve the world.

Peter uses simpler words. He says that we are resident aliens who are here to show people, to proclaim the excellencies of him who has brought us out of the darkness into his marvelous light. We are here for the world, but we are not like them.

Now how liberal churches and conservative churches have really failed in this in about 1926—actually going on the exact date, 1926—is when that the liberal conservative church split and the liberal and fundamentalists and both of them took half of these truths. And ever since then, honestly, we have done a poor job in maintaining this tension.

The liberal church has done a good job of being for the world. They have served the world. They are in the world. They want to help the poor. They want to maintain a good relationship with the world. The problem is they have become worldly. And once you lose your distinctions you are not calling people into the marvelous light. You are just kind of in the darkness with them.

The conservative church has done a good job of maintaining its distinctions. We are not like you. We don't believe what you believe. We are not immoral like you are. The problem is the conservative church has set themselves up to be the world's enemy. We are not here to serve you. We think you are bad and we want to defeat you and in order to establish kind of a cultural supremacy.

Here is an illustration was written home to me. This point was was driven home to me when I was a Mississippi State. I was a campus minister there and the president of the gay student association came to me to ask if he could to RUF. It was very interesting to me. Here is a homosexual, a very up front, out there guy. Everybody on the campus knew he was the homosexual who stood up for all homosexuals on the campus. He is in the newspaper every other week. And he is asking me if he could come to RUF.

Why was he asking?

Well, he wanted to know something about Jesus. He thought there was something missing. And yet he didn't trust me. He didn't trust us. He wondered, are they part of that war against culture? Am I the enemy to these people?

And I did my best, you know. I said, "You will be warmly welcomed. I would love you to come. I will walk you in. But I am going to tell you the exact same thing I am going to tell everyone else. Unrepentant sexual sin, unrepentant sin of any sort will destroy you."

We want that to be our message. On one hand we need to be able to go to the homosexual and say, "You are no worse than anybody else." We have to throw away the conservative agenda that sees these people as enemies that we are fighting with these people for our culture or for our country. We have to throw that away. They are not the enemy. Their sin is the enemy. They are what we are fighting for. We are fighting for them, to rescue them from their sin.

So we have to throw away this mindset that says the homosexual is the enemy. On the same token we have to throw away that the liberal mindset that says the homosexual is our friend and there is nothing wrong with him and the culture that is intolerant is the enemy. We have to maintain the distinction that sin is bad. It is going to destroy you. We have to maintain both. And that is hard.

It is hard because we are afraid. We are afraid that if we lose our distinction... if we maintain our distinctions we are going to be shunned from the culture. We want to be like everybody else so they will like us. I am having a hard time preaching this sermon because I want you to like me. We want to be like everybody else so they will like us.

At the same time we are afraid that we are going to lose our culture. We are going to lose America if we don't fight these people. And we are afraid that we are going to lose something valuable.

And I want you to know. I think Peter comes to us in this text and he puts his arm around us and he invites us to something better. And he says, “I know you are afraid. And I know this world disappoints you. But I want you to know you have so much more. This world is not your home. Home is so much better. And at home you will be welcome and you will be secure and nothing is going to be taken away from you.”

God calls us to be resident alien servants. Resident, we live here; alien, we are not like this place; servants, we are for this place. And he tells us as we imitate Christ we unveil to the watching world the glory of Christ.

So the first point, we are resident aliens. We are different. He said, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”²

What does he say? He says, “Abstain from the passions of the flesh. You have got to be different from the world.”

And it frustrates us when the world gets us wrong, doesn't it? It frustrates us when the world thinks, when non believers—let me use more specific language—when non believers think of the Church as self righteous or judgmental. That is frustrating, isn't it? They are taking us wrong. I hate being taken wrong.

Do you know who hates being taken wrong? Brandon Spikes. Do you know who Brandon Spikes is? Brandon Spikes is a middle line backer and the team captain for the Florida Gators defense. And poor Brandon got caught on film gouging a guy's eyes against the Georgia Bulldogs. And it tore him up and the coach suspended him for one half of the game.

He said, “No, suspend me for the whole game.”

And they interviewed him and he told the press, he said, “I just don't want to be known as the kind of guy who gouges eyes.”

And I just want to say, “Well, I got one piece of advice for you, Brandon. If you don't want to be known for gouging eyes, stop gouging eyes.”

Most of the people I know are not known for gouging eyes.

And I think Brandon would look at the Church and he would say, “Well, Christians, you don't want to be known as self righteous and judgmental. I got one piece of advice for you. Don't be self righteous and judgmental. Stop judging everybody who is different from you. Sniggering and looking down on everybody who disagrees with you.”

You want to have a ministry? You have got to be holy. We can't control our sin. We have to repent of it. We have to turn away from our fleshly passions.

² 1 Peter 2:11.

Now, on one hand the word fleshly passions is so confusing because immediately you all think [?] and food. All right? Ok. They are fleshly passions and I don't... Saturdays are a weird days for me. Saturdays when I spend at home, an unbiased observer would assume that my purpose on Saturday is to eat until I explode. I am just kind of a human vacuum cleaner. If it is in the house, it is meant for me to eat. And yes I just had a meal seven minute ago, but I am hungry again. I would rather you not ask me about it.

And that is a fleshly passion. To fill whatever it is that we want right now we go fill it. We indulge the flesh whether it be with rest, wheter it be with entertainment, whether it be with food, whether it be with sex, we want to feel good now. We want to indulge the flesh.

And, yes, that is a fleshly passion. But let me ask you this.

If I said no to all food because I want to be in shape. I want to look better than this one day, would I say every morning, every morning, is that a fleshly passion? Yes. The desire to look better in a mirror is a fleshly passion. If you don't get out of bed in the morning are you indulging in fleshly passion? Yes. You are indulging sleep. You are being lazy. If you get out of the bed in the morning to go and work and to prove to the world that you are a valuable human being, are you indulging a fleshly passion? Yes. You are indulging a passion to feel good about yourself, to be respectable. They are everywhere. And Satan does not care which one you indulge.

There is a bad move that illustrates this well. It is a bad movie. You cannot go and watch it on my authority. I want you to know that. It is called... but I will tell you the name of it. It is called *The Devil's Advocate* and it has got [?] and the guy who is in *The Godfather*, Al Pacino who is Satan in this move. And it is great because in the movie [?] is a lawyer. He starts the movie out by defending this sexual predator, a terrible human being who is guilty. And [?] goes into the bathroom and he stares in that mirror and he is... do you really want to do this? And he goes out and he gets the guy acquitted and it immediately is thrust into notoriety and he is snatched up by this wealthy law firm by, of course, Satan. And he becomes Satan's lawyer and he compromises every possible moral and he indulges every fleshly passion and he ends up being just a terrible human and losing his soul.

And at the end of the movie it snaps back and he is back in that bathroom. And he has decided, "No, I am not going to do it."

And so he goes back out into the courtroom and he recuses himself because he knows this person is guilty and he is going to lose his license to practice law. And now all of the televisions are around him because he is so moral.

And Satan is one of the reporters and he is last seen as he stares at the camera and he says, "I don't care which path you choose. You can go the path of immorality or you can

go the path of morality, but as long as you are doing it for yourself and not out of an obedience and a love for Jesus, I have still got you.”

Abstain from the fleshly passions.

And I want to talk to you. I talk to people who indulge in some fleshly passions all the time. You know, folks who are, oh, looking at pornography and they want to stop. They come to me. I want to encourage you. Keep coming to me. I want to continue helping you. But the problem is people that have the fleshly passions of being workaholics, you say you understand the problem, but do you really believe what Peter says when he says, “Abstain from earthly passions that war against your soul”?

See, if you have got this sense of righteousness, it is easy to believe you are doing fine. And I want you to know you are losing your soul. You amount to more than how you look in a mirror. You amount to more than your productivity. You amount to more than that. And if you can't take time off from work long enough to acknowledge that, your business will keep you from ever developing your soul. You can't be busy and find God in the quiet places of your heart at the same time. The Lord commands rest because he is the God who is found in times of rest. It takes time to feed a relationship with him. It takes time.

You cannot buy the 30 second a day Bible just like you can't do the three minute ab workout and have the washboard abs. You can't buy the 30 second a day Bible and have a meaningful, deep relationship with the Lord that fills your soul.

It takes time. It takes time.

We abstain from what wars against our soul and we do good.

He says, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”³

Keep your conduct honorable... it is confusing. It probably means something along the lines of make your conduct attractive. Be beautiful. Live the kind of life that people are going to look at and be attracted to that. They are going to want that. They are going to see people who are filled and complete and want to be like that.

Ultimately these people will glorify God if they see that. There is a power in an example.

Tony Compolo was speaking on traditional marital roles once at a very liberal small feminist all women university and he could make no headway. And he used his final chance to address the crowd to tell a story of his mom and his dad. And he just talked about how his dad married his mom when she was very young. He took care of her and he provided for her and, yes, she submitted to him and she followed him and ultimately

³ 1 Peter 2:12.

they stayed married about 60 years and she died and he and his brothers took their dad out to the front porch and they talked to him about heaven and they cried with him for a long time and they talked to him about heaven a little bit more and he said, “Boys, I am glad your mom died first.”

They said, “Why?”

He said, “I never want her. I am glad she will never have to know this kind of pain.”

And that story quieted the crowd that hated and he had people coming up to him saying, “I want that kind of relationship, but I don’t trust men to give it to me,” an example of beauty that quiets the mouth.

That is what Peter is talking about.

This idea of glorifying God in the day of visitation it could mean one of two things. It could mean that the unbeliever is going to see your good works and be converted. It might just mean that the unbeliever’s mouth will be stopped on the day when God appears and there will be no more lying.

The unbeliever will have to say, “Yes, that life was better. I should have lived it.”

We are called to be different from the world, holy, not indulging our flesh, not using our freedom to do whatever we want. Be different from the world. We can’t follow the path that the liberal churches follow and get in to whatever the world has said was right that week.

But we are also called to be servants of the world. Peter said our position is to be a servant, not a ruler. In order to serve the world we have to be different from it, but we can’t hate it either. We can’t seek to destroy the world.

Conservatives have been good at maintaining our distinctions from the world, but we have been bad at serving the culture. We have communicated that we hate the culture. And unbelievers have gotten that message. Our talk of a spiritual war, of a cultural war, we are not the only people who hear that. Unbelievers do believe that they are the enemy of the Church. They really do.

Why would an unbeliever come to me and ask permission to come to RUF? Nobody else asked permission.

You know, the fraternity guys who were indulging every fleshly passion never asked me for permission to come. And everybody knew their sins were public, just as public as this homosexual’s. Why was he the one who asked for permission? Because he was the one who was ostracized for his sin.

We hate and vilify the culture most in a political arena. There is this desire for power and the conservatives want to just consolidate power and eradicate the culture and establish a theocracy, godly government. And you have to know that is an old desire. That was around when Jesus was walking the earth. They were called the zealots. They wanted to overthrow Rome and they were mad at Jesus for not joining in with that. And Peter told these zealots to submit to Rome.

Listen to what he says.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.⁴

Now let's think about that for a second. The last time Jesus saw Peter that we know of he was fishing and Jesus made Peter some breakfast and Peter came and they were restored to each other. They were reconciled. And the last thing Jesus said to Peter was, "Follow me."

He said, "Peter, when you were young, you went wherever you wanted to go, but when you are old you are going to stretch out your hands and you are going to be carried to a place you do not want to go."

And he knew what that meant. He knew that he was going to be crucified. Every day of his life from that day on he knew that he would be crucified. Every time he saw a Roman crucified. We all know that we are going to die. None of us are going to be crucified. It is a big deal to be hung from your hands and feet and left to die over many hours.

And every time he saw a Roman soldier he had to wonder, "I wonder if it is going to be him. Are you the one that is going to kill me?"

Every day. And he knew that his death would have to come from Rome. Even the Jews say in John 18, Pilate says, "You want to kill Jesus, you go kill him." And the Jews said, "No, only the Romans can execute."

And Peter said, not just obey the emperor, honor the emperor.

And we think, "I am not going to honor an immoral president."

You can't get more immoral than someone who kills Christians for fun.

Honor the emperor.

⁴ 1 Peter 2:13-17.

Why does he say we should submit? He says, “For God’s sake.” He says we display the glory of God by willingly submitting to our rulers. God has put them in place and God will do his work through them.

When Jesus is before Pontius Pilate, Pilate says, “Why are you not talking to me? Why are you not defending yourself? Don’t you know I can have you put to death?”

And Jesus said, “No, you couldn’t, not unless I wanted you to. You would have no authority unless my Father in heaven had given it to you.”

Do you still believe that is true? Think about this for a moment. If you were an unbeliever, a non Christian, outside the circle of Christianity and you saw Christians wringing their hands because they had lost an election, would you be attracted to serve that God? I mean, what good is a God that can’t win an election? Good heavens.

But Peter knows there is no power except for that what comes from God. Peter reminds us that the rulers are in place that God wants in place. Now that doesn’t mean that God is always doing something that we think is good. God wanted Jesus executed in a certain way. He told us about it all the way back in the Psalms. Jesus was going to be stretched out, nailed to a tree, left to die there.

He says in Deuteronomy, “Cursed is anyone who dies on a tree.”

He told us how Jesus was going to die. In order to do that he had to raise up a government that would do that, an evil government. And God used evil hands to serve righteous purposes.

And Peter knew that God was still doing that. When the Jews started persecuting Christians in Jerusalem, what happened? The Christians left Jerusalem. And what did they do? They preached the gospel to other cities. And when Nero started persecuting Christians in Rome, what happened? The Christians left Rome. And they started preaching the gospel to other cities.

And when Arius started spreading his lies and heresy in the Christian Church in 300 AD and the people who believed in the trinity were the minority and they were sent out, what did they do? They preached the gospel to the Barbarians.

And when the Roman Church became an evil thing and started persecuting those who believe the gospel, what happened? Christians went out and started preaching the gospel in unsaved places. And over and over and over again we see God accomplishing a great and a glorious purpose through evil rulers and leaders.

And Peter says, “Guess what? Your king is not up for election. Your king has never lost an election and he is not going to run any time soon. And whoever wins only will serve him.”

And I don't know what that means. But we are going to honor and we are going to serve the rules God has put in place like we were serving God because we trust in him, because we trust him.

I don't know. You know, I am talking to you. I am as firmly entrenched in this as I could possibly be. When president Clinton was in office I spent six hours a day listening to Rush Limbaugh and the Black Avenger. And I mean the only internet sites I ever surfed were just right wing conspiracy websites and I was convinced he was the spawn of Satan.

And it was sin. It was sin. It was distrust of Jesus. It was wrong.

And I am convinced now that whatever president Obama does, whatever he does, he will do it to the benefit of my country. He is going to do whatever he does to the benefit of my home because my country is God's kingdom and we are not going to lose. We are not going to lose and president Obama is his servant whether he knows it or not.

So what does submitting mean? To submit he says honor the emperor, submit by honoring the emperor. Now if you are parent you know what that means. It is the same thing God tells your kids to do to you. So whatever you want from your children, you go give that to your president. You know, you want your children to agree with every decision you make? Probably not. Do you want them to go off into the room and talk bad about you and spread lies about you to their friends? No, actually not.

Do you want them to call you an idiot behind your back? No, actually I don't. I want them to honor me.

If you want a great avenue to worship in this, you know, I am sorry. If you want a great avenue to do evangelism in this the reddest state in the union, when your friends start talking about how stupid president Obama is tell them you support the president.

And when she says, "Why?" say, because you love Jesus.

And when she says, "But he is doing evil things that are against Jesus."

And you say, "Not unless Jesus wanted him to, he wouldn't."

Caesar did evil things against Jesus, too, and it ended up bringing the salvation of the world. And I trust what God is doing. I do not trust what president Obama is doing. I trust what God is doing.

What does that mean? Does it mean you sit idly by and watch things you care about go to pot? No. You need to vote every time they let you.

And that is tempting for me because my name is Ricky Jones and I can vote in every precinct in this state. And they are not going to ask for an address. I could. I really

thought about that the last time. Just for fun, let's just see how many times I can vote. But not wanting to go to jail, I didn't.

Vote every time they let you. Denounce evil, every time they see it, but do it in a way that communicates respect and compassion. Remember, our desire is not to defeat those with whom we disagree. It is their conversion. And finally, and I will get off this forever and ever and I am never wanting to preach a sermon less.

I want you to do and I want you to know this. The glory of America, the United States of America's glory will fade just like Persia's glory faded, just like Babylon's glory faded, just like Greece's glory faded, just like Rome's glory faded, just like Europe's glory is faded, just like Britain's glory is faded. The United States of America's glory will fade. God is not interested in establishing the kingdom of God by the military might of the United States of America. He won't do it that way.

And I don't know what that means and I don't know how and I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet. I can tell you some things I hope it means. I honestly hope it means we get overrun with illegal aliens. And I say that because if you will go back to the beginning of the story, remember, I don't like to visit third world countries and I would love to preach the gospel to some third world people without having to leave Tulsa. That would be cool. That is about the only way I am going to do it.

And it is going to mean that the homosexual group becomes more and more accepted in culture and that is a good thing because I want to preach the gospel to homosexuals and I can't do that if they are going to deny that they are gay. We have got to get their sin out in the open before we can ever even talk about it.

I don't know, whatever. Let's not go down there. But I do know that God is going to win. I know that one day we are going to sit around with all those that have been converted and say, "The nations of this world have become the nations of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever and ever."

And that day has already started and it will not end. And we can get a glorious sense of the peace to let our culture go and by remembering that we are not home. And this culture is not our inner ring. It is not our group. It is not our family. We are part of a much more precious inner ring.

I don't know if you are familiar with the phrase, "inner ring." It is something that C S Lewis wrote about. He says, "Whenever a child grows up and sees his mom and his dad hugging you want to be part of that hug. And as you grow... and the older you get the more you keep kind of seeing these rings you want to be a part of and you go to school and you hear people laughing about a joke and you start laughing before you even know what the joke is because you want to be in. And you see people sitting at a table and you want to go sit at that table and you see people talking about a sports team and you want to make them your favorite sports team because you want to be in. And it never really goes away. And you get older and you go to college and you hear people talking about a

fraternity party. So you want to be in that fraternity because you want to be in and you see people at work talking around the water cooler and you are not thirsty, but you go to the water cooler because you want to be in.”

And he says the reason for that is because we have this deep need within us to be part of the inner ring. And the reality is there is an inner ring. There really is. There is an inner ring of three, the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And they love each other and they love each other so much they wanted to make the ring bigger. And Jesus explains that he is, in John 17, that he is going to die in order to bring us into that inner ring.

And he says this. These are glorious words he prays for us. He says:

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.⁵

Now listen to why he is doing this.

He says, “[I want them all to] be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”⁶

Why is he doing it? Why has he set himself apart? Why does he die? To bring us into the inner ring.

And when we are in that ring we will not be disappointed. When you are in that ring I want you to understand something. When you are in that ring, the person who knows you the best has not abandoned you. When you are in that ring, the person who knows you the best has not turned away from you and gone away to find someone else more attractive, has not exploited you, has not hurt you. When you are in that ring, you are in a ring with a person who knew you down to your toes, loved you and died for you. When you are in that ring, you are secure enough to let all the other rings go.

Please pray with me.

⁵ John 17:14-19.

⁶ John 17:21.