

“The Time of Your Exile”

(1 Peter 1:17-25)

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The Word of the Lord from 1 Peter 1:17:

“¹⁷And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,”

This verse is about praying as a Christian and living as a Christian; as one who puts themselves into the picture of today’s worship bulletin: you go through life walking with the Risen – victorious over sin, death, and the devil – Living Lord Jesus Christ! The picture itself depicts the two disciples and Jesus on the road to Emmaus, but it is a reminder of the life we are called to live (remember in verse 15 of 1st Peter 1 -- just before today’s epistle -- it is God who calls you, so that in response you may call on Him as verse 17 says). God calls you to a living faith in the Living Lord and He does so through His Word...remember that those Emmaus disciples said that their hearts burned within them as Christ spoke to them (Luke 24:32)...in the same way we know we are truly walking with Jesus today when He continues to speak to us every, single day through His Word causing our hearts to burn with a living faith. But if you take away the Word, there is no faith; and if there is no faith, then we are not walking with Jesus, but we’re walking alone with all of the worthless things (the “futile ways” and “perishable things” that St Peter refers to in verse 18). There are only two ways to live: on the road that leads to eternal life *with* the Living Lord; or on the road that leads to eternal death *without* the Living Lord. These are the only two options.

Don’t ignore Him Christian, because He is the only life...every other form of so-called “life” will turn to dust and lead to death! But in this section of 1st Peter everything hinges on the way you live and how you conduct yourself. Let me say it again because what I just said sounds blasphemous in relationship to being saved by grace alone, but it is biblical and as I will demonstrate completely consistent with God’s grace alone as our salvation: “everything hinges on the way you live and how you conduct yourself.” 1st Peter 1:17 has the main verb in a very long sentence that extends from verse 17 through 21: the verb *anastrophete* which is translated as “*behave, conduct oneself, live.*”

The Word of the Lord here at 1st Peter 1 is teaching on *HOW...how are we to behave, conduct ourselves, and live? That’s the question and it teaches you point blank how to live as a*

disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ; as a true child of the Living God. Everything is known in proper context.

First in regard to your prayer life which is of course an extension of your faith life, ask yourself “how do I pray?” Answer: you pray to God and present yourself before the Lord every single day knowing that “God judges impartially according [to your deeds].” This truth must be put into the framework of Law and Gospel. You come before the Father who is an impartial Judge who deals with you ONLY on the basis of Law and Gospel. There is no other criterion. And because there is an objective universal criterion, God is truly impartial and treats all people the same. The way God judged St. Peter is the way He judges you; the way that God judged Moses is the way that He judges your pastors; the way that God judged the martyrs is the way that He judges your children; the way that God judged St. Mary is the same way that God judges your enemies. He is 100%, totally and completely impartial:

Romans 2:11: “For God shows no partiality.”

Ephesians 6:9: “Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.”

Colossians 3:25: “For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.”

Acts 10:34: “So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,’”

And here is the verdict when God judges according to His Law: we are completely and utterly condemned “because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).” This past week the media has had a heyday indicting and elaborating upon the sin of Los Angeles Clipper’s owner Donald Sterling for his racist remarks and his reprehensible treatment in the past in regards to housing discrimination towards minorities. But here’s the thing: we bask in self-righteousness. We love to accuse someone else of their wrong-doing; we delight to gossip about the bad things that other people do; and this makes every man a judge; it makes every man prove that in accord with the sinful nature we want to be God. It is a sad commentary on our culture, because in God’s courtroom being banned from the NBA for life and being fined 2.5 million dollars is nothing, but being banned from heaven and eternal life is everything! When God judges impartially and only our bare sin is laid before Him, then Donald Sterling has nothing on us, because we are all sinners deserving condemnation.

But the text clearly says that He judges each man's deeds. How on earth does the Gospel ever come into play here? Luther: "There is no faith where there are no good works. Therefore link faith and good works together in such a way that both make up the sum total of the Christian life. As you live, so you will fare. God will judge you according to this...Works are evidence of our belief or unbelief...They show whether you have believed or have not believed...The works are fruits and signs of faith and that God judges people according to these fruits, which certainly have to follow, in order that one may see publicly where belief or unbelief is in the heart." (Buls, *Exegetical Notes: Epistle Texts, Series A, Festival Season Sundays*, 119).

Stoeckhardt wrote: "Evil works are the result of unbelief, of impenitence. And so it is either faith or unbelief upon which hangs man's final fate." (ibid, 119) Lenski echo's this teaching: "There is no discrepancy between judging according to work and judging according to faith..." (ibid, 119).

Let me explain in the most-simple terms: when you have a living faith trusting in Jesus Christ alone as your righteousness, as your forgiveness, and as your eternal life, then this faith impacts what you do. And even if what you do is continually marred by sin, faith makes it so that it is also marked in Christ. The believer does everything with Jesus. The Christian is always walking with Jesus, so that their every deed is viewed by the Father as connected to Jesus. Your works – yes though they themselves are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) – when put into Christ are testimonies of faith in Jesus. You don't trust in the works, but your works show that you trust in Jesus. Your whole life is now "in Christ" ... these two little words "in Christ" occur almost 200 times in the New Testament to describe your life as a Christian. You walk with Christ and your every thought, word, and deed is in Christ...and while these thoughts, and these words, and these deeds are in themselves always tarnished by sin, they are also in Christ who has ransomed you...not with perishable things...but with His precious blood (verses 18-19).

But there is more because this prayer life extends to a real *change* in the way you conduct yourself: this has nothing to do with meriting favor; earning forgiveness; or confusing law with grace. All of these things are thrown out the window, but the one – like you – who has been forgiven by the blood of the Lamb, now conducts himself or herself in the following way:

You now -- as one who has been put into Christ, covered by the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins – live in a holy fear (not terror), but reverence. Think of Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; [but] fools despise wisdom and instruction." Think of Proverbs 16:6: "...by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil."

This kind of fear is a humble awareness of standing before our God who has forgiven our sins. We just don't want to insult Him. We just don't want to live against Him. This is holy fear. It is not living the way its living in order to *gain* salvation, but in order to never give it up. This kind of holy fear comes from knowing God's love and mercy in the Gospel of Jesus. It is not the fear of a slave, but the fear of a child who knows that their father loves them. Such a child wants to please their father. The Christian saved by grace alone, now lives this way, in a holy fear. You just don't want anything to take away your eternal life which is more important to you than ANYTHING else...everything else fades away, but life in Christ is FOREVER! That's why we live with a holy fear.

This is ALSO why it is important to grasp the meaning of living in *exile* as St. Peter says in 1st Peter 1:17. To live in exile is to live away from your true home. The word literally means a temporary residency or temporary stay, so that you sojourn in a place that is not your home for a short time (though it may seem like a very long time). All the while the temporary residence is an alien residence so that you are like a stranger in a foreign place. Ambrose wrote, "You have been given time on this earth, not eternity. Use the time as those who know that they are setting out from here." (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI, 78) As a result, we "get" the hymn that says, "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home; Danger and sorrow stand Round me on every hand; Heaven is my fatherland, Heaven is my home." Luther therefore advised that "We must deal with temporal goods as if they did not belong to us." (Buls, 119). We are just passing through.

But in the meantime, the world tries convince us that this is where we really belong. Sin and Satan try vigorously to convince us of the lie. But how you live makes all the difference! God judges impartially. You therefore want to remain in Christ. Therefore you live in a holy fear, not wanting to turn against God; and therefore you are wise and you treat yourself as being in exile and while in exile Satan tries to get you to hold onto the passing things (the "futile ways" and "perishable things") so that you will give up living with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ in exchange for the passing things of your exile. This account in Genesis 39:6b-12 helps us to see the proper response of the believer who lives in fear and knows that they are in exile:

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

¹¹ But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹²she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

This is what St. Peter inspired by the Holy Spirit is saying. You stand before your impartial Judge. The ONLY WAY you can stand and not be condemned is to be IN CHRIST! Now that you are IN CHRIST – the RISEN, the LIVING Christ – conduct yourself this way: 1) In holy fear...not a slavish fear; not a fear of being condemned or punished; but a HOLY FEAR...loving God more than anything! What produces this holy fear?...not our efforts, not our discipline, but the GOSPEL! You're forgiven! You're set free from the bondage of sin and Satan! God sees you as pure and holy! You have been given the Kingdom of God! All that is His is now yours! This Gospel produces HOLY FEAR so that you will not let anything steal your life away...we would rather hold to Jesus than to return to the throw up of sin; we would rather hold to Jesus than to return to the mud of sin. And also live 2) knowing that you are in EXILE...this is not your home; this is a temporary residency; and the things of this world...alcohol, drugs, gambling, fornication, adultery, pornography, living for money, living for power, etc. – even when people say that they are "just having fun," these are landmines in this foreign land designed to destroy your faith, so when they come up, be like Joseph: RUN! GET AWAY! This is the way of life for those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ!

This is the new life: loving that we walk with Jesus; rejoicing that in Him all of our sins are forgiven and we are judged: FORGIVEN! And now we live with a holy fear...we don't want anything to mess with our eternal life! We don't want anything to come between us and our GREATEST LOVER: Jesus! And we are wise to know that we are in exile...we are just passing through, so we don't want to treat the things in this life as offering lasting life; ONLY CHRIST does that so we will hold to Him...we will hold to the Gospel, to His body and blood given to us in the Holy Sacrament; to the forgiveness of sins; to eternal life!

Recently one of my children reminded me of how important it is to a child to be popular in school. We all want to be accepted and made to feel that we're important. I shared with him, however, that this was not as important as people say it is. What if someone came to you and said, "you can become the most popular person in the world!"? Imagine how you would be treated! You would be invited to all the parties! You would be showered with gifts! These are the things highly valued while we're exiled, but holy fear says, "No thanks! I am already highly valued by the Lord; I am already loved by God; I am already cherished by Christ! I have already been given the Kingdom of God!" Now if God chooses to permit us to be more or less popular that's up to Him...who knows, maybe one of you will invent something and make it on Shark Tank and become very popular; maybe one of us will write a book that will make the New York Times best seller list; maybe one of us will buy the L.A. Clippers, but what is valued; truly

cherished is none of these passing things. It is better to remember that we have Christ and that we are therefore known by God. So it is better in this life – even more than seeking to be popular – to live in holy fear and to remember that we are just passing through as those forgiven, and washed by the blood of the Lamb!