

Aliens and Strangers-Part Six “Growing in Our Salvation” Or “Great Expectations!”

1 Peter 2: 1-3

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Text: 1 Peter 2:1-3 (NIV) ¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

These words of Peter are really quite shocking. He has spent the entire first chapter building up the church and encouraging the Christians to whom he is writing. He has reminded them that they are aliens and strangers living on Planet Earth. He has reminded them of their great joy in their salvation and their love for Christ. He has reminded them that they are receiving the goal of their faith which is the salvation of their souls. And most importantly he has reminded them that they have been born again...and now with all of those things in mind...he says something a parent might say in a great moment of expectation: “Rid yourselves of all malice!”

From time to time, we need to hear from the Holy Spirit with great clarity something that ...frankly...we may not really want to hear. Perhaps this morning, we need to we need to be reminded... that there are signs that a Christian is growing up. There are characteristics that tell us how we Christians should behave as the outworking of our salvation. I suggest that we, on this Communion Sunday, need to consider what we must be “rid of” in our own lives. Me and you as well. First, let us pray.

A few weeks ago, I asked you to fill in the blank in a sentence that read “The Key to Happiness is _____!” Of course, our answer was “Knowing Jesus!” Let’s do that again today. Consider this sentence with the word missing at the end. “God is a God of _____!” Of what? A God of mercy? Patience? Love? Justice? All true. But today we consider a very different point...one that is usually overlooked. Namely this: “God is a God of **Expectations!**” God is all of those other things too but we as Christians need to know that God has always been a God who expects certain things from his people in response to his grace. Not in order for them to earn their salvation but rather responses because they *have* their salvation! So, in that sense, **God is a God of Grace and a God of Expectations!** It has always been that way.

Consider the way God explained himself to Moses when he gave him the Ten Commandments. It is a great mistake to overlook the few words of the preamble to the list. Notice, before God even begins to enumerate his laws, he says:

Exodus 20:2 (NIV) ² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

This pattern was exactly the one used in ancient treaties between a sovereign and those who served him. The treaty would begin with a statement of what the sovereign had done for his people and then the treaty proceeded to list what the sovereign expected of his subjects. It might read for example: "I am your King who has given you land and prosperity; I expect you to be loyal to me and bring my portion annually to me as your response to my goodness to you!" In Exodus 20:2, God said something far more dramatic to his ancient people, the Jews. Again, he said:

Exodus 20:2 (NIV) ² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

God was saying "You were slaves before I delivered you. You were suffering in unthinkable misery under the yoke of brutal Egyptian Pharaohs. You cried out to me and I answered your prayers! I was pleased to do so. Therefore, I have every right to expect the following behavior from you!" And then the Commandments. God has always been a God of *expectations*.

God told them that as a people who had been delivered from slavery that they should have no other Gods! They should make no idols and they should not use his name in vain! They should honor the Sabbath and they should honor their father and mother. They should not murder or steal or lie or covet! Those are the characteristics of people who have been delivered by God from slavery! **God is a God of Grace and a God of Expectations!**

But wait. Wait...God was speaking to his ancient people whom he had delivered from slavery in Egypt. Again, God said:

Exodus 20:2 (NIV) ² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

But someone will say "What does that have to do with us? We were never slaves of anyone!?" But that is not true! That is the entire point this morning as we approach the Communion Table. Every single human being no matter where they live or what they do or what they have is, in their natural state, a slave! Without being reborn...we are slaves. Slaves to what? Slaves to sin! Consider the very words of our Lord himself as he debated one day with those who came to hear him teach. There they are! Trying to figure Jesus out! They are asking

themselves “Who needs this man...this Jesus? We have Moses and the law. What is it that he expects from us?” [There is that words again...”expects”].

So Jesus speaks to some who, up to that point, believed him. Be careful please...to get this. He is about to shock people who **DO BELIEVE** him! He is about to push them hard out of their spiritual complacency. Something I need...and something you need...from time to time. To be pushed out of our spiritual comfort zone. Listen closely as Jesus sets the stage for this truth: **God is a God of Grace and a God of Expectations!** Here it is...the issue is slavery...

John 8:31-36 (NIV) ³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

There it is! He said “the truth will set you free!” The fact is that all the world outside of Christ is in bondage. They are not free. Even if they are not in jail they are not free from their bondage to the power and the pull of sin! And so the text we study is very subtle. Did you see it? Look again with me:

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

How many times in our studies of discipleship have we noted that the Greek word for “disciple” is “matha-tais” which really only means “student.” That is why we see several times that some disciples walked away from Jesus and did not follow him anymore. So, here he says “If you are really my disciples” and many of them are offended. Look at their reply:

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

God is a God of Grace and a God of Expectations! Grace will set is free from the power and pull of sin but it took a bleeding Savior tortured upon the Cross to set us free. And the irony is and was that most people do not even know they need to be set free! Most people do not even know that they are slaves in their natural state without Christ. And so those listening to Jesus reply “We’ve never been slaves of anyone!” But Jesus is saying “Oh yes you have been...and perhaps you still are!” And he explains himself:

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

So...how are we to relate all of this to our friend and teacher the Apostle Peter? The title today is “Growing in our Salvation.” Here is my reply: **God is a God of Grace and a God of Expectations!** And God expects those he has set free from

the power and pull of sin and from its punishment...he expects those he has set free...to live as people set free! Not just freedom from rules and laws but real genuine freedom from the power and pull of sin that makes us do what we ought not to do! And so we go all the way back to Peter's words:

¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

God has expectations. He expects me as one who has been set free from the power and pull of sin to live...as one who had been set free from the pull and power of sin! There are traits and behaviors that should not be found in the lives of anyone who has really been set free from sin. But tragically, I have seen people who will insist that they are Christians but they still show exactly the traits...of slaves. Still chained to their sinful natures leaving one to wonder if they were ever really set free...if they were ever really saved. Unwilling to even talk with someone they are angry at. Filled with fury and offense as if they had never offended others or offended God himself. I have written to people and called people who are estranged from the church only to have them ignore my words and calls and act like slaves to sin. But Peter said:

¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

Now, we're going deep. Please lock in for a few more minutes. This is an astounding truth. Look closely with me. Peter's words are translated "**Rid yourself...**" Here is the question: are these words an imperative or a description? Is Peter saying "You must rid yourselves of these behaviors...malice and deceit etc." Or is Peter saying "Having been born again you are now free to more and more lay aside these behaviors...if you've been rid of your bondage you will be setting aside these behaviors"...???" He is describing how they should be! In other words, I do not think that these words of Peter are linguistically an imperative as if he is saying "Having been saved, here is **WHAT YOU MUST** do..." Rather he is saying "Having been saved this is what you are doing..." The saved person delivered from the slavery of sin is the person growing up in salvation and who is quite naturally setting aside their malice and hate! Peter is not so much giving a directive but describing how the Christian should naturally meet...God's expectations!

When we see people claiming to be Christians who will not forgive and who do not constantly seek to be reconciled to others...we must wonder if they really belong to Christ. The language used by Peter is literally "Laying aside..." Frankly it is language that suggests talking off garments. Gradually but steadily taking off soiled clothing and putting on the new garments of Christ.

I was asked to speak at a Right to Life Dinner recently. That was an honor. I took some time off that afternoon to clean up our back lawn...blow the leaves onto the neighbors side...things like that. ☺ I was wearing an old pair of jeans and a paint laden sweatshirt and sneakers. Can you imagine if I had shown up at the dinner wearing those things? My hosts would have been stunned at my disrespect. I did not. I laid aside the work clothes and showered up and put on a nice suit and tie and went to the dinner...all cleaned up...because they had every right to expect their keynote speaker to look like a mature servant of God!

And God has every right to see us looking like and acting like people who have been set free from the labors of sin...and who have put aside the clothing of malice and deceit and hatred and unforgiveness. He expects that. Because, in the end, **God is a God of Grace and a God of Expectations!**

Let us pray.