

Right Thinking Leads to Right Living

1 Peter 1:13-25

Temple Baptist Church

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Shortly before Sarah and I were married we decided that we wanted to watch several of the films that had won the Academy award for best picture over the course of the last few decades. There are several films that stood out – some for being quality films – 1995’s Braveheart and others with memorable music scores – 1976’s Rocky. While others left me asking bewilderedly, “Who in their right mind would ever vote for a film like that?” – 2002’s Chicago. Maybe I just wasn’t expecting it to be a musical! For those of us movie watchers, we know that there are movies that we can watch over and over and over again without getting tired of the plot, humor, action, or romance, which I learned for several people at TBC is The Princess Bride.

Yet, there are those movies that are excellent, but for one reason or another, we decide that seeing it once is enough. For me, one of these films is the 2013 Academy award winner for best film – 12 years a slave. For those of you that may not have seen the film, it tells the true story of Solomon Northup, a New York State-born free African-American man who was kidnapped in Washington D.C. by two conmen in 1841 and sold into slavery. After being sold and shipped to New Orleans, Solomon is told that if he wants to survive in the South that he must adapt to being a slave and not tell anyone that he is a free man. The movie, based on Solomon Northup’s memoir, 12 years a slave, details the suffering, abuse, and manipulation that Solomon and other African-Americans were subjected to during this wickedly cruel portion of our country’s history. The story depicts Solomon remaining a man of integrity throughout his trials and tribulations on a Louisiana cotton plantation as he remains focused on his goal of returning home to his family.

Although there exist some nuances between the American slave trade of the nineteenth century and those found in first century Rome, it would have been common for the makeup of a first century church to include three kinds of members: slaves, freemen, and freed men. In his commentary on 1 Peter, Edwin Blum writes, that “People became slaves in various ways – through war, bankruptcy, sale by themselves, sale by parents, or by birth. Slaves normally could look forward to freedom after a certain period of service and often after the payment of a price. Money to buy his freedom could be earned by the slave in his spare time or by doing more than his owner required. Often the price could be provided by someone else. By the payment price, a person could be set free from his bondage or servitude. A freed man was a person who formerly had been a slave but was now redeemed.”

The act of redemption – being saved - would have been something that first century Gentile Christians living in the dispersion would not have taken lightly. As mentioned last Sunday, Christians scattered throughout the five Roman provinces were driven from their homelands due to earthquakes, famines, wars, and not to mention persecution for one’s Christian faith. Although these Gentile believers would have yearned for physical redemption from the oppression placed upon them by Roman governing authorities, Peter was writing them in order

that they might be encouraged by their imperishable inheritance in Christ – as we talked about last Sunday. Here, in v. 13-25, Peter gives tangible instructions on how ancient believers, as well as modern believers, can embody the Christian lifestyle of holy living that the Father requires of His followers when He calls them to Himself.

Romans 1:13-16 (ESV): “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

It Starts with Right Thinking

One of the greatest challenges followers of Jesus Christ, particularly long-time followers, face is the tendency to drift away from personal holiness. This often presents itself as indifference or apathy towards personal sin. Things that the Bible clearly states are contrary to the life Christ has called us to no longer hold the weight they once did. As time progresses, those who once experienced enthusiasm and joy in their obedience to the Lord has now been replaced by a lethargic heart. Where does this lethargy stem from? One could make the argument that a lack of personal holiness derives from enduring physical, emotional, and/or spiritual pain without having a healthy outlet. While I believe there is definitely truth to that argument, I think apathy towards personal holiness goes even deeper.

Peter instructs the believer to prepare their minds for action. To put it more figuratively, Peter is telling Christians they need to roll up the sleeves of their mind – they must be prepared to do work. When Satan attacks believers he often does it first by infecting our minds by implanting negative thoughts and beliefs about ourselves. The evil one is crafty. He takes our past sins and twists them in such a way that we begin to believe our current identity is defined not by who we are in Christ, but rather who we were when we acted out of character of our newly found identity in Jesus.

So, this is by no means an exhaustive list, but here are some examples of how this twisted thinking leads to wrong living. You grew up in a verbally abusive home with a father who took out the bitterness of his own life on you by making you feel unworthy, insecure. As a result, you choose not to grow close to anyone else for fear that they would see your true self – the self that isn’t good enough to cut it. Perhaps you’re a married man that has hidden your addiction to pornography from your wife for the last decade only to have her discover your secret fantasies. She is crushed – feels powerless – feels unworthy. You say, *If only I had deleted my browser history! The time I don’t do it and she finds it.* You look her in the eye and lie to her that it’s not what she thinks it is, but she knows. You know. As physical intimacy disappears in your marriage, you dive deeper into your porn addiction. You tell yourself, *I deserve this.*

Maybe you're a woman who is married to a man that is emotionally distant and easily distracted. *He is always on his phone...he never takes me out anymore. He used to buy me gifts, but now he won't even look me in the eye she says.*

You start attending a couple's bible study even though your husband refuses to go with you. While there, you begin to take notice of a married man and how he loves and leads his wife well. You're jealous of her and attracted to him. As the weeks progress you intentionally get to know him and begin to imagine what it would be like for him to leave his wife for you. You exchange phone numbers and text one another occasionally. One day, when you are at your wits end with your husband, you pour out your broken heart to your secret crush. He's a rescuer and promises to support you no matter what. Every day you text more and more sharing intimate details about your life that are only to be shared with your spouse. One day, they find themselves alone after bible study. A physical affair takes place between the man and woman. Afterwards, both feel rotten inside. They've destroyed their marriages, their families, hurt their church community, and feel utter shame in the presence of the Almighty God.

Folks, the reality is that there are repercussions for our sin. Period. Even if our parents, our spouse, or our boss doesn't find out, we cannot delete our browser history from the sight of Jesus. He is omniscient – He knows all. He sees all. But the beautiful thing is that He forgives all when we repent of our sin. Psalm 103:10-12 say, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

Yes, our hope is fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, but to no longer be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance is going to take resistance on our part. It is going to be a fight. It doesn't come easy – it takes work. Roll up your sleeves and get busy growing in holiness. Craig Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary writes, "Proper living, of course, begins with right thinking, so we must be mentally prepared and self-controlled by focusing fully on our ultimate destiny in Christ." If the ultimate destiny for believers is in Christ, which it is, then we must conduct ourselves as the Lord conducts Himself, as holy. To be frank, that means when we're tempted to look at pornography, or send explicit text messages to someone that isn't our spouse, or even to wallow in our own self-pity, we fight to focus on our ultimate reality in Christ. As we grow in holiness our desire to be more like Jesus will outweigh the temptation to give in to our evil desires.

When we fail, we repent of our sin, get up, dust ourselves off, and move on being holy as the Lord is holy.

The Cost of Redemption

Romans 1:17-21 (ESV): “And 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, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

Yesterday we celebrated Veteran’s Day – a day where we remember our service men and women for their sacrifice to defend our country from foreign and domestic violence as well as to ensure the rights we are guaranteed as citizens of the United States. Today we have approximately 1.4 million active military members abroad with an additional 800 thousand defending and supporting our communities stateside. When I consider the sacrifice that our American soldiers make I often have this image of a young father, full of integrity, returning home from deployment. He is embraced by his wife, young daughter, and infant son who he is meeting for the very first time. As the family adjusts to having husband and dad around, an uncomfortable, yet needed interaction takes place between father and daughter. The daughter has disobeyed her father a second time after receiving a firm warning that if she acted up again she would be disciplined.

As the father takes a few moments to collect himself so as not to act harshly out of anger, he explains to his young daughter that because of her disobedience she would receive a spanking. The young father has tears in his eyes as he dismisses his daughter’s pleas for him to stop. After the discipline has taken place, the father holds his crying daughter in his arms and tells her that he loves her. He tells her that what he did was for her own good.

As Christians, we have been redeemed from a worldly lifestyle. We have a God, who is both Judge and Father, whom we must give an account. Blomberg writes, “The first role (Judge) inspires a healthy fear of the last day; the second (Father) tempers that with the reminder that our true home and family are not on this earth and that God is waiting to welcome those who are his into a completely loving relationship with him.”

God and the soldier/father play a critical role in the discipline and transforming process of their children. Yet, the most significant aspect of both God and the soldier is their willingness to sacrifice for not only those that love them, but also those who are indifferent to their suffering. Although there exist similarities between the two, these two examples are kind of like comparing apples and oranges. The soldier, a man of integrity, and in his own right, a hero, is also a sinful fallen human being. He is like all of us – coming up short of God’s glory. Jesus, on the other hand, has never come up short of God’s glory. In fact, He *is* God’s glory! More precious than perishable things such as silver or gold is the blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish. And this One – the Father’s glory – the lamb without blemish – was nailed to a cross so that His Father would be glorified and that our faith in Him could be made complete.

In his book, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, John Piper writes, “The biblical perspective is that the cross is a witness to the infinite worth of God’s glory, and a witness to the immensity of the sin of my pride. What should shock us is that we have brought such contempt upon the worth of God that the very death of his Son is required to vindicate that worth. The cross stands in witness to the infinite worth of God and the infinite outrage of sin.” The cost of our redemption is one that without the sacrifice of Jesus is insurmountable to attain. If we call God our Father and say that we love Him, then that also means that we must have a healthy fear of Him, which leads us to right living even to the point of earthly suffering.

Flesh Fails, but God’s Word Flourishes

1 Peter 1:22-25 (ESV): Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”

Brothers and sisters, I have to tell you that at certain points in my life, being obedient to the truth of the Gospel has been like pulling teeth – it has been the last thing that I’ve wanted to do. There was even one occasion in my life, while in seminary (cemetery!) – which has a reputation for killing Christians’ faith – that I told Sarah, who was my girlfriend at the time, that I wish I didn’t buy into the whole Christian thing, because it wasn’t allowing me the freedom I desired. For me, the problem was (which was a good thing!) is that I *did* believe Scripture was true. I believed the Father sent His Son to die on the cross for me so that He could be glorified and I could take part in His glorification by first believing and then by growing holy as He is holy.

Perhaps some of you have found yourself (or currently find yourself) in a similar predicament. As Christians, we love the idea of being purified, but what it actually takes to be purified? Yeah, not so much. It stings! It’s the Holy Spirit slowly chipping away at the junky build-up around our hearts, around our minds. Our sinful nature doesn’t want to love others or glorify God – we want to love ourselves! We want to glorify ourselves! But in my opinion, with trying to keep it simple – let’s obey the truth of the good news. No more justifying, or rationalizing for what we think we want that God does not want for us!

Friends, if you’re sick and tired of being obedient – keep being obedient anyway. Roll up the sleeves of your mind and walk, or better yet, run away from your former ignorance. That isn’t who you are anymore. You belong to Christ. As we continue to remain obedient to the truth – even through suffering – saying yes to Jesus and no to the world we’ll become more normal. When we act in accordance with the precepts of Jesus we will grow in love for our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

V. 24 is a quote from Isaiah 40 that asserts the character of God. This quotation is a prophetic message of God to an exiled and oppressed people and it's the same for the Christian Gentiles dispersed throughout the five provinces of Rome in the 1st century. Those same words ring true for believers today that are living in exile.

For Solomon Northup, living in exile was his reality for twelve years as he was stripped of all human rights and forced into slavery. His life regularly included whippings by his cruel master. In 1852, Solomon confided the truth of his wrongful imprisonment to Canadian carpenter Samuel Bass who, at his own personal risk, wrote several letters to Northup's family giving details about Solomon's whereabouts with the hope that he would be rescued. The following year, 1853, Solomon was released and returned home to his wife and now adult children in New York. Although Solomon experienced horrible suffering throughout his twelve years as a slave on a Louisiana cotton plantation he kept focused on his goal of getting home. Friends, as followers of the living God, it's crucial that we too keep focused on the goal – and that is realizing that our ultimate destiny lies with Christ. And with only one life to live, let's live it fully to glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.