

DO BEAUTIFUL

SERIES: FLOURISH: HOPE IN A STRANGE LAND



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1 Peter 2:11-20

Fifth Message

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1 Peter 2:11-20

For the second time in 1 Peter, we will be reminded today that our home is not in this world. We're sojourners in this world. These days, it may come as some comfort to know that we are only sojourners in this world—and that a new world is coming.

Nevertheless, we live in this world, which raises questions about what God would have us do in this world. In these days of sorrow and strife, we may not know what to do. We may not even know what to think.

However, Peter would have us believe that a great opportunity lies before us. His words have particular application to our lives as citizens and as employees.

Keep your conduct good

1 Peter 2:11-12:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 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.

Peter addresses us as “beloved.” We are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” Once were “not a people,” but now we are “God’s people.” Once we “had not received mercy,” but now we “have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10). We’re God’s treasured possession. Indeed, we’re beloved—loved by God!

The word that is translated “exiles” is the same word that Peter used in the beginning of the letter when he addressed us as “exiles.” Now he also uses another similar word to describe us: “sojourners.” If we believe in Jesus, essentially we are foreigners, because our home is elsewhere: heaven. We’re foreigners, but we are loved foreigners. God’s love sustains us as sojourners. Our first allegiance is to God, our heavenly king, and to what he decrees.

As God’s beloved, we have a war to fight—but not against any human adversary. We’re in a war with Satan (Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 12). We’re also in a war against “the passions of the flesh,” which “wage war” against us, even against our souls. The flesh—that is, humanity in opposition to God—would have us indulge in malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander, and the like and give ourselves over to temporary pleasures and a futile way of life (1 Peter 2:1).

Instead of indulging the passions of the flesh, Peter wants us to literally keep our conduct “good,” or beautiful. He is especially concerned for how we conduct ourselves among the Gentiles, which by Peter’s time meant unbelievers. Living and working among unbelievers, we as followers of Jesus must strive by the power of the Spirit to be God-centered and other-centered, loving and courageous. Such conduct manifests itself in good deeds.

Some may speak against us as “evildoers,” because they’re ignorant, because we have in fact failed in some way, or because they believe that faith in Jesus is evil. All we can do is our best to live morally good lives regardless of how we’re perceived. If we do, perhaps we will change some minds.

During these trying times, watch for opportunities to do good, to bless people. Some of you have led us into, and participated in, our shower ministry. Shower ministry? Yes, we’ve opened up the “secret shower” on our campus for unhoused people to use, which has been a great blessing in the time of Covid, with hygiene being especially important. We’re working with governing authorities to open our campus at night as a “safe parking zone” for four families or individuals living in vehicles. A few of you have organized an effort to bless the Mountain View Police Department with letters of appreciation.

Do good! What does it mean for us to do good as citizens?

Be subject to governmental authorities

1 Peter 2:13-17:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

By “every human institution,” Peter means every governmental institution—in Peter’s time and place, both the Roman emperor, Caesar, and governors sent by him to rule the regions in the empire. Peter wants his readers in Asia Minor to “be subject” to such authorities because they restrict evil behavior and promote good behavior. Apparently, even the pagan rulers in the Roman Empire were fulfilling this role, at least in part. Even tyrants usually hold evil in check by preventing anarchy.

What does it mean for us, in our time and place, to be subject to governmental authorities? First of all, we don’t bow to governmental authorities. We are subject to governmental authorities “for the Lord’s sake,” because it is “the will of God,” because we are “servants of God,” because we are “free”—because we bow to him.

To be subject to authorities means that we strive to be law-abiding citizens whenever possible. In some cases, it may not be possible—“for the Lord’s sake.” At times in the Scriptures, God’s servants disobeyed authorities for his sake, because authorities commanded them to do something contrary to his will (Exodus 1:15-21; Daniel 3:17-18, 6:10; Acts 4:18-20, 5:27-29; Hebrews 11:23).

On the one hand, we never defy laws simply because we don’t like them. On the other hand, we always defy laws if they order us to disobey the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. If a law ordered us to kill a child, including an unborn child, we would disobey that law, just as the midwives in Exodus 1. If authorities ordered us to stop preaching the gospel, we would defy those authorities, just as the apostles in Acts 5.

Be good citizens

It is “the will of God” that we strive to be law-abiding citizens. Not only that, it is also “the will of God” that we “do good.” We’re not simply passive, so that we do no harm in society, we’re also active, working for the welfare of society (Jeremiah 29:7). Then, if certain people speak of us as evildoers because they don’t fully know what they’re talking about, perhaps we can silence them by our good deeds and change their minds about what it means to follow Jesus.

We obey the laws and we do good “as people who are free,” not as people who bow to Caesar. We bow to God as “servants of God.” As servants of God, we are free men and women: free to obey him. It doesn’t matter which government we’re under: we’re free. In obedience to God we find true freedom, true humanity. We become what humans are supposed to be. What does God want us to do as his servants? He wants us to obey the laws (usually) and do good (always).

We might think that because we are servants of God, we should disobey governmental authorities whenever possible instead of obeying them whenever possible. Peter warns us against such a posture. With such a posture, we might use our freedom “as a cover-up for evil”—disobeying the law in the name of God while nursing hatred for authorities in our hearts.

Worthy of honor

Peter instructs his readers to take certain postures: toward everyone, regardless of their faith; the “brotherhood,” the family of believers; God; and the emperor. Obviously, the postures he recommends are not the only ones we are supposed to assume toward specific individuals, groups, or God.

For example, we should honor everyone *and* honor God, even though Peter only instructs us to honor everyone and the emperor (Acts 22:3, 1 Corinthians 6:20). We should love the brotherhood *and* love everyone, even our enemies, even though Peter only instructs us to love the brotherhood (Matthew 5:44). We should “fear the Lord and the king,” even though Peter only instructs us to fear God (Proverbs 24:21, emphasis mine). Peter is recommending specific postures without necessarily excluding other postures.

The command to “honor” is the only imperative to appear twice. What’s interesting, considering that Peter has just commanded submission to the emperor, is that

he instructs his readers to “honor” both the emperor, who is of the highest social standing, and everyone, including those of the lowest social standing.

The emperor, like leaders today, is a human, no more, no less—worthy of honor, yes, but not to be fawned over, as if they were worthy of blind allegiance. Or, as Jesus put it so eloquently, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17).¹

When I was a newspaper reporter, I covered a public meeting in which one of the participants objected to the use of the words “politicians” and “people” in the same sentence. He stood up and shouted, “Politicians aren’t people!” Then he squatted down, placed his hand a few inches above the ground and added, “They’re little things, way down here!” Then he stormed out of the meeting.

Well, politicians *are* people, of course. They’re worthy of honor, just like everyone else.

Not holding our tongues

Honoring governmental authorities does not necessarily mean holding our tongues.

Jesus told Pilate, a Roman governor, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). He was critical of rulers who “lord it over” their subjects and instead defined leadership as serving others (Mark 10:42-45). Jesus called Herod the tetrarch “that fox,” not exactly a term of endearment (Luke 13:32). John the Baptist castigated Herod, saying, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife” (Mark 6:18). Jesus was crucified. John was beheaded.

Those beholden to political parties often bind themselves to speaking well of some candidates and poorly of others depending almost solely on political affiliation. As followers of Jesus, we are beholden to him—which means we’re beholden to the truth.

We speak the truth. We can remind governing authorities that they are accountable to God, who commissions them to be truth-telling ministers of justice. If they crucify us or behead us for it, we’re in good company.

Not neglecting to meet together

While governmental authorities have restricted indoor, in-person worship services, I have heard these words from Hebrews 10:25 quoted: “not neglecting to meet together.” I have also heard Acts 5:29 quoted: “We must obey God rather than men.” (Of course, the man who spoke those words in Acts is the same man who also instructs us to “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.”)

We at PBC, along with other churches, have worked closely with Santa Clara County officials. There is no evidence that their directives are aimed at persecuting churches any more than they are aimed at persecuting restaurants or Great America (amusement park). In fact, they have changed some of their directives at our request, allowing for outdoor singing and for speakers to remove masks.

We at PBC have chosen to follow the directives of authorities up to this point. Are we neglecting to meet together? Are we obeying men rather than God? May it never be!

The writer of Hebrews says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). The imperative is to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works. Meeting together and encouraging one another are ways to stimulate one another to love and good works. (By the way, especially inasmuch as Peter is encouraging us to practice good works in this passage, I hope my sermon, based on his words, is stirring you up.)

Multiple ways

Although we have not met together for large-group worship services, we have not neglected to meet together. We are meeting together in multiple ways, through live stream; through video conferencing; and through in-person, outdoor, socially distant gatherings. Our Step Closer Sunday meeting in our parking lot at 9 a.m. is open to everyone. Our youth groups, men’s ministry, and women’s ministry, and young adults ministries have had in-person, outdoor meetings.

The Seniors Bible Study, which I lead, continues to meet each week over Zoom and Televisit. Some people have actually joined our group who weren’t able to meet

with us in person. We had something like thirty-five people join us Wednesday, an all-time record, I think.

I, along with other pastors and elders, continue to meet with people face to face one-on-one and in small groups, outdoors and socially distant. I'm meeting with people in parks, on front porches, and in backyards—and on golf courses. (Golf is a socially distant sport!) As the weather gets colder, I'm excited to bust out my down parka, which I've used only a few times since I moved back here from Idaho in 1994.

Did not Jesus say, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"? (Matthew 18:20) A gathering of two people equals a church meeting!

Go to our website, pbc.org, and click on "Connect." You'll find ways to meet with others so that you can encourage and be encouraged. As always, if you want to meet with a pastor or elder, let us know. We'll meet with you one way or another.

Our worship center remodel is in the final stages, and we're planning to gather for worship services beginning sometime in November, probably with one hundred people per service. We'll continue with live stream. We'll pass along more information as plans develop.

If the time comes

And please, let us refrain from casting aspersions at governmental authorities who are making difficult decisions at a difficult time. Let's not ascribe to them sinister motives, as if we know what's in their hearts. All of them are worthy of honor. Some of them may even be part of the "brotherhood" we're instructed to love.

And if the time comes when we deem it necessary to disobey governmental authorities, because we must obey God rather than men, we will do so respectfully, not belligerently. If we believe we are being ordered to cease meeting not for health reasons but because we are following Jesus, we will meet.

If we are persecuted for following Jesus, we won't complain about it. Like Peter and the other apostles, will rejoice that we are "counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). If authorities throw us in jail because we are obeying God rather than men, we'll start a jail ministry! Isn't that what the apostle Paul did? (Acts 16:22-34)

Do good: be a good citizen. What does it mean for us to be good employees?

The New Testament and slavery

1 Peter 2:18-20:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Much could be said about the difference between what we know about slavery in the Greco-Roman world and the race-based, chattel slavery we're more familiar with from U.S. history. Scholar Wayne Grudem suggests that a word stronger than "servant" but weaker than "slave" is needed in 1 Peter—something meaning "semi-permanent employee without legal or economic freedom." He adds: "Although 'servant' comes the closest, no single English word is adequate—perhaps because no comparable institution exists in modern Western society."² It's estimated that about a third of the people were servants in the Greco-Roman world of the first century.

For the most part, it appears that the servants in Peter's world had it better than the victims of the Atlantic slave trade and their descendants. Nevertheless, they were owned by other people and could be abused, as Peter acknowledges here.

Although Peter and the other New Testament writers don't commend slavery, as if God ordained it, the way he ordained and commends marriage, neither do they overtly attempt to overthrow it. Scholar Thomas R. Schreiner explains:

*Again we must remember that New Testament documents address readers in the situation in which they live Furthermore, New Testament writers were not social revolutionaries. They did not believe that overhauling social structures would transform culture. Their concern was the relationship of individuals to God, and they focused on the sin and rebellion of individuals against their Creator. New Testament writers therefore concentrated instead on the godly response of believers to mistreatment.*³

Scholar Karen Jobes adds, “The direct transformation of society’s structures, even those that are patently unjust, does not seem to be the goal of the NT writers. Rather, it is the transformation of the believer regardless of one’s situation that is the primary concern.”⁴

Peter and other New Testament writers are primarily concerned with bringing people to Christ and nurturing worshiping communities. What then happens in such communities?

Theologian Marva Dawn answers, “Worship is the unique praise to God by the countercultural community that equips that community with a sufficiently deep sense of itself in relation to God that it can go from its worship into the world to effect social change.”⁵

Moreover, scholar Miroslav Volf observes:

*The call to follow the crucified Messiah was, in the long run, much more effective in changing the unjust political, economic, and familial structures than direct exhortations to revolutionize them would ever have been. For allegiance to the crucified Messiah—indeed, worship of a crucified God—is an eminently political act that subverts a politics of domination at its very core.*⁶

The New Testament thus effects social change, albeit indirectly.

Be subject to masters

Peter instructs servants among his readers to be subject to their masters, just as he instructed all his readers to be subject to the emperor and governors. He wants servants to be subject literally not with all “respect” but with all “fear”—fear of God, not fear of masters.⁷ Because they fear the Lord, because they are “mindful of God,” servants should seek to obey their masters, even “unjust” masters—unless, of course, their masters order them to sin, at which point they should disobey if possible.

Even servants who are obedient to their masters may suffer unjustly and may even be beaten. Nevertheless, Peter instructs them to endure. He wants them to “do good.”

Peter literally opens this section with the words “this is grace.” He literally closes the section with the words “this is grace in the sight of God.” What is grace? Here, grace is suffering unjustly for doing good. God values such doing and rewards such doing (Ephesians 6:8). Doing good and suffering for it is sacred stuff.

Suffering servants endure by entrusting themselves to God and believing that God will right all wrongs, just as Jesus, *the Suffering Servant*, “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

Jobes observes, “Submitting to unjust suffering is the way to break the world’s ways and perhaps one day bring unbelievers to praise and glorify God themselves.”⁸

Scholar N.T. Wright comments on Peter’s words:

*He isn’t simply recommending that people remain passive while suffering violence. He is urging them to realize that somehow, strangely, the sufferings of the Messiah are not only the means by which we ourselves are rescued from our own sin. They are the means, when extended through the life of his people, by which the world itself may be brought to a new place.*⁹

Be good employees

How do Peter’s words to servants in his day apply to us today? Grudem again:

*Therefore, even though there is no exact parallel to such “servant” status in modern society, the fact that this was by far the most common kind of employee-employer relationship in the ancient world, and that it encompassed a broad range of degrees of functional and economic freedom, means that the application of Peter’s directives to “employees” today is a very appropriate one In fact, the word “employee,” though not conveying the idea of absence of freedom, does reflect the economic status and skill level of these ancient “slaves” better than do either of the words “servant” or “slave” today.*¹⁰

Just as we should strive to be good citizens, we should strive to be good employees, known for both our work ethic and for how we treat people, even if we’re treated unjustly. I’ve talked with many of you who have worked for some people who could generously be described as

unreasonable. The Valley seems to attract and nurture its share of unreasonable, even warped, people.

Nevertheless, it is possible to endure by entrusting yourself to him who judges justly. This is grace. In an unreasonable work environment, you have to believe that the Lord is with you, forming you, and leading you.

I was once fired as a newspaper editor—unjustly, I believe—because the publisher and I didn't see eye to eye, but the Lord saw me through it, and in the end turned me into a pastor.

Do good: be a good employee.

Purpose of good deeds

Let's back up to the beginning of the passage. Notice that the purpose of good deeds here is not so that unbelievers will like us more. Nor is it to improve the social or economic lives of people. Nor is it to change the world and make it a better place.

Peter wants us to practice good deeds so that unbelievers will see them and “glorify God on the day of visitation”—that is, when Christ returns. Peter wants us to abstain from the passions of the flesh, conduct ourselves in a good way, and practice good deeds so that unbelievers will come to faith in Christ. [Never in the New Testament do unbelievers glorify God. In fact, on many occasions they refuse to glorify God (Acts 12:23; Romans 1:21; Revelations 11:13, 16:9). Peter therefore envisions unbelievers becoming believers.]

It is a noble goal to try to improve the lot of suffering people and to make the world a better place. God values such efforts and uses such efforts—perhaps in this world, definitely in the new world. But there is a reality to face. Unless suffering, unbelieving people repent of their sins and turn to Christ, they will spend eternity in hell, where they will suffer way more and for way longer, away from the presence of God, than they have ever suffered on earth.

Peter echoes the words of the Lord: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)

When Peter healed a lame beggar in Jerusalem, people were “filled with wonder and amazement.” He did a good deed. People noticed. Then he preached the gospel to them. As a result, many came to faith in Christ,

which is what got him in trouble with the governing authorities (Acts 3:1-4:4).

I have always appreciated what we do on our medical missions trips. We set up clinics and treat people who have little or no access to medical care. Then we give them the option of meeting with someone who will pray for them, explain the gospel to them, and get them plugged in to churches. We teach at pastors' conferences and preach at churches in order to strengthen those churches. We hope and pray that those we treat at the clinics and others will see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Let's do good, pray for people to come to Christ, and watch for opportunities to share Christ with people.

What's beautiful?

Peter writes more in generalities than in specifics. Applying his words, we know we should be good citizens. We know we should be good employees. However, simply based on his words, we might want to know what we should do in specific situations.

One of the Greek words in this passage that is usually translated with the English word “good” (*kalos*) can also be translated “beautiful” (verse 12). [The same word is translated “honorable” and “good” in verse 12.] Such a translation brings out the deeper meaning of the word. Peter advocates a “beautiful” way of life, full of actions that could be defined as “beautiful.” A great opportunity lies before us: the opportunity to live beautiful lives.

Anyone who has Christ can live a beautiful life—regardless of suffering. You can live a beautiful life no matter how much you suffer. In fact, suffering may expand your capacity to live a beautiful life.

In these days of sorrow and strife, when you may not know what to do or even what to think, ask yourself, “What's beautiful?” Try to answer that question, and you will not go far wrong. Do good: Do beautiful!

In conclusion, I'd like us to listen to a quote I've used two or three times before. I may use it two or three more times before I'm through. It seems appropriate, in light of both this passage and these days, to employ it once again. Listen to Martin Luther King Jr.:

To our most bitter opponents, we say: “We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with

soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. ... Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.”

Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind’s quest for peace and security. Napoleon Bonaparte, the great military genius, looking back over his years of conquest, is reported to have said: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have built great empires. But upon what did they depend? They depended on force. But centuries ago Jesus started an empire that was built on love, and even to this day millions will die for him.” Who can doubt the veracity of these words. The great military leaders of the past have gone, and their empires have crumbled and burned to ashes. But the empire of Jesus, built solidly and majestically on the foundation of love, is still growing.¹¹

That’s beautiful!

7. Peter just instructed his readers to fear God. Likewise, when Paul instructed the Colossians to obey their masters, he told them to do so “with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord” (Colossians 3:22).
8. Jobes.
9. N.T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster Press, 2011) 70.
10. Grudem, 124.
11. Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Collins Publishers, 1977), 47-55.

Endnotes

1. See my sermon, “Faith and Politics,” based on Mark 12:17: <https://www.pbc.org/messages/faith-and-politics>.
2. Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 124.
3. Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude, Volume 37* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2004), 136.
4. Karen Jobes, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 190.
5. Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 68-9.
6. Miroslav Volf, “Soft Difference: Theological Reflections of the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter,” *Ex Auditu* 10:15-30, 1994), 23.