

A LIVING CHURCH FOR A DYING WORLD

April 19th Devotional

THE CHURCH IS IN THIS WORLD BUT *NOT OF THIS WORLD*?

Devotional Scriptures:

John 15:17-21; 17:14-20

Study and Reflection:

Praise the Lord everyone!

You may recall that we began this teaching about A Living Church For A Dying World, immediately after celebrating Christ's great victory over Satan and sin, by dying on the cross, but rising to New Life on the third day!

This characterizes God's Intent for HIS CHURCH. Victory and triumph will be the outcome. This, in the midst of the most despicable and ungodly evil that the forces of darkness could unleash...God, His People, His Church will TRIUMPH!

Remember our theme scripture.... "upon this Rock (Truth of who Jesus is...God manifested in flesh)....**I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH, AND ALL THE FORCES OF EVIL SHALL TRY, BUT FAIL IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO DEFEAT IT!**

Our devotional readings for today focus on Jesus' identification and character of some of the forces and conditions that would array themselves against His Church. In both passages Jesus opens up our understanding regarding the 'world!'

The **WORLD**

Greek: kosmos

The earth. The geographic sphere of mankind.

The 'world' speaks of the universe, separate from heaven. It denotes the arrangement of the entire universe that is under the curse of and espouses a culture of sin...all that is opposed to the rule of God.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus prepares His disciples for His departure, and their new assignment and relationship in this earth. Just after sharing the last supper, He informs them that they must love one another. He warns them that this is crucial since the 'world' will HATE them! He opens theirs and our understanding by reminding them that the reason the world will hate them is because they first hated HIM. He encourages them to remember that HE chose them 'out of the world!' He reminds them of their spiritual place. He tells them and us that you are "in the world, but not of the world!"

In John 17, in His Intercessory High Priestly prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says to God, "the world hates them because they are not of this world!!!" in other words, they live here but are not from here. They live here but do not live under this '?system.' He then prays not for their deliverance out of the world but that they will enjoy Divine Favor, and not be overcome by the powers of evil, that work in and control this world!

Action Items:

I challenge you to give a block of time in prayer and introspection, regarding your status in this world. What message is the Lord giving to you to be "in this world but not of this world!!?" *Note: to be 'in' something, identifies your location or geographical position. To be 'of' something, defines your identity. You are defined by it and its rules and standards. To be 'of' it, means you come from it and belong to it!*

Journal and write where you see yourself today.

Involving Others:

Since you know that the church is not simply an individual, you must connect with others of like-faith and honestly discuss this issue. Be open and transparent. Do not be argumentative or defensive. Own together where you see the church. Transformation demands honesty and truthfulness before the Holy Spirit. This will result in genuine transformation and growth.



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April 20th Devotional

IDENTIFYING AS 'RESIDENT ALIENS'

Devotional Scriptures:

John 15:17-21; 17:14-20; Philippians 3:20



Study and Reflection:

As you see, we have simply added a single verse to our previous passages. As you again focus on the understandings Jesus gave us in John, I challenge you to focus on a possible way of seeing and identifying the church as it is called out of the world to live in this earth. Consider the phrase 'Resident Aliens.'

Two Christian Thinkers, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, wrote a book published in 1989 called 'Resident Aliens.' Their sub-titles are eye opening and challenging. One is 'A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry.'

When Jesus speaks to us about our identity, in the world, He is warning us to understand and remember our 'Culture.' Culture is 'the way we do things here!' Every business, organization, family, church, etc. has a culture. Their culture identifies who they are and how they conduct life. In a future teaching about the church we will focus on the impact of culture. Your culture more than law will impact and dictate who you are and how you live. Paul in the Philippian passage reminds us of this when he compares how the world thinks of itself and how it lives versus how the church must. He says our conversation, that is our way of life, or our 'citizenship' is from Heaven.

The Church is a Christian Colony from heaven, living in a foreign land. The church is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. In baptism our citizenship is transferred from one dominion to another, and we become, in whatever culture we find ourselves,

Resident Aliens.

To be a resident, but alien is a sure formula for loneliness that few of us can sustain. Indeed, it is almost impossible to live and minister alone because our loneliness can too quickly turn itself into self-righteousness or self-hate. That is why Love, for God and one another must be our core-identity and way of living.

Action Items:

I challenge each of us to focus on the designations we have just introduced. Do you think we are called by the Lord to identify in this world as Resident Aliens? The phrase emphasizes not only that we are from 'somewhere else,' but that the time is not transient, i.e. resident says we are not here for a short time.

Alien is something that we see in the science fiction movies, most of us fear and certainly don't want to be. An alien is a creature from 'outer-space.' An alien in immigration thinking is someone living in a country in which they were not born and owe allegiance to the country of their birth. **IS THAT US?**

Involving Others:

Please apply the above action items in discussion with other Christians. Are we to be Resident Aliens? Is the church indeed supposed to be, act like, live like a 'Colony,' i.e. a 'beach head,' an 'outpost,' and 'island,' of one culture, living in another, and holding on to the values of the country of its' origin!?

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April 21st Devotional

HEAVENS' CITIZENS, LIVING AS UNWANTED IMMIGRANTS

Devotional Scriptures:

Philippians 3:20; Acts 16:36-38; Ephesians 2:11-12; 19



Study and Reflection:

One way to translate Philippians 3:20 is ‘our manner of life’ is in harmony with heaven. By definition a “Resident Alien” is a foreign national living on an official basis in a country of which they are not a citizen. In essence it is an individual who has *immigrated* from their native land in order to take up residence for a particular purpose.

Most often these who are categorized as such find it difficult to function in this different location as they are alien or foreign to its customs and culture. While in some cases there are similarities of the immigrant’s homeland to the foreign land there is often the internal longing of the Resident Alien to return to his or her country of origin.

Jesus taught His followers that they have now taken on the identity and citizenship of another kingdom different from the one that they currently lived in. He wanted them to identify with the rules and culture of the new kingdom which would most often cause them to be outcast in their current places of residence. They would become “Resident Aliens” and this identity would cause conflict as they sought to live out the purpose of their pilgrimage. Those in the environment around them would not embrace them nor should they lose their identity and seek to find acceptance.

The Church’s residency is in the Kingdom of God and as citizens we are Resident Aliens in this world. We are to live in this world as those who realize that this world is not our home, that we are strangers and pilgrims passing through. That we are here in this world on assignment, on mission, called to demonstrate through our lives what the kingdom of God looks like everywhere we go.

Action Items:

As I shared with the church a few weeks ago, I recently sent in my U.S. passport for renewal. I had to go to a specific authorized website and fill out and verify certain things about myself in order to have my passport renewed. I realized that not everyone who applied for a passport or renewal received a favorable affirmation.

It made me realize how blessed I was and we are to be ‘citizens of heaven.’

The apostle Paul reminds us that citizenship in certain countries is something of high value to be appreciated and cherished (Acts 16:36-38; Ephesians 2:19)

How much do you value and cherish your citizenship? How devoted are you to the country from which you came? Does your life reflect to yourself and others your allegiance to Christ Jesus and His Kingdom?

Involving Others:

Again, be brave. Be bold. Be courageous. Discuss with others how you feel about your status as unwanted immigrants. Could it be that I/we are so comfortable being a part of this world that we may have compromised our alliance and loyalty to the true King?

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April 22nd Devotional

RESIDENT ALIENS EMBRACING 'KINGDOM ETHICS'

Devotional Scriptures:

Matthew 5-7; Jesus' Sermon on the Mount; Ephesians 4:1



Study and Reflection:

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduces Principles and Values, the code of conduct, the actions of those who will inhabit the soon coming Kingdom of God. Although the Church was not yet birthed. He is preparing those who would be the Church to live differently from those who are of the world. **ETHICS** have to do with moral principles and values relating to proper conduct. At some point we must decide that we are committed to embrace and *Do* what Christ calls us to and not just *Know* what He teaches.

This is what Paul is getting at in Ephesians 4:1. The KJV says we are to “*walk worthy of the vocation to which we are called.*” The NIV may give us a clearer picture as it reads, “*Urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received!*”

As I thought about being Resident Aliens, immigrants, inhabitants of the Lord's Christian Colony, it reminded me of a book I read over twenty years ago that rocked and challenged me greatly. The book was written by Ron Sider, someone I met and interacted with several times at conferences. Ron is a noted Christian social activist, and professor of theology. Its title and subtitle should challenge all of us who sincerely desire to please the King who has called us into His Kingdom. The title is: *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*. Sub-title: “*Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World!?*”

Here is his core statement and premise: National Pollsters George Barna and George Gallup in recent surveys of American Christians have concluded:

“Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general.” “Whether the issue is divorce, materialism, sexual promiscuity, racism, physical abuse in marriage, or neglect of a biblical worldview, the polling data point to widespread, blatant disobedience of clear biblical moral demands, on the part of people who allegedly are evangelical, born-again Christians.”

Can we deny that this statement could be somewhat accurate and applicable not just to classic evangelicals, but to a wide range of Christians, no matter their denomination or belief system, including ours: **OUCH!!!!**

Action Items:

We must be careful, not to become defensive, living in denial, or worse yet being so self-immersed in our definition of godliness that we become self-righteous. The purpose of Bible study and teaching is to open ourselves to God's Word in the presence of the Holy Spirit, so that we can be transformed and better reflect the Will of God to a dying world.

On a scale of 1-10, judge yourself on where you are overall when it comes to the principles and values that Jesus teaches. In your prayer time ask the Lord for the courage and grace to demonstrate in word and deed, the values and actions of those determined to be Biblical Resident Aliens.

Involving Others:

You know what to do. Have an honest discussion with others in your small group of our individual and corporate commitment to “*living a life worthy of the calling we have received.*”

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April 23rd Devotional

COUNTER-CULTURAL LIVING MANIFESTING POSITIVE KINGDOM ETHICS

Devotional Scriptures:

Ephesians 4:1; 32 Matthew 5:38-48

Study and Reflection:

Jesus' teaching in our devotional passage in Matt 5, clearly teaches principles and practices that are not naturally seen in our society today.

What extreme and radical principles. Jesus challenges them and us not to live and practice lives in the manner that we are used to seeing and repeating. He says, you have been taught the practice and law of reciprocal violence and revenge. An "eye for an eye!" You kick my dog, I'll kick your cat. You assault me, I will in turn assault you back. Our culture by design and practice, teaches us how to act toward one another. Our societal and spiritual culture demands that we not let people... 'to get away with evil!'

The Lord teaches us that they who have been born of God, must live another way. He teaches that our reaction to the evil and wrong of others must not be to respond in kind. Jesus teaches us to live in a way that is truly, 'counter-cultural.'

A counterculture is a culture whose values and norms of behavior differ substantially from those of mainstream society, sometimes being diametrically opposed to mainstream cultural values and mores. The Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit is a community of people who follow after and practice values and practices that clearly reflect the heart and character of Jesus.

Jesus challenged them and us, by saying... "you have been taught to love your neighbors, and hate your enemies." But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

These are not the norms of our society. These are not teachings that we are familiar or comfortable with. These teachings demand that we have been born-again, filled with God's Spirit, and now reflect a new and different set of values, perspectives, and life practices.

Again, the church is a community of people who follow after Jesus, with a Kingdom Ethic that serves to edify Christ and his church. The church is a community of followers of Jesus who study, obey, teach, and train others in the practices of Jesus teaching. "Larry Rasmussen, writes that the church was first understood as, and called, "the people of the Way" (cf. Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 24:14,22) The Way was foreign to popular of the day. "The people of the Way" stood out as Resident Aliens.

Action Items:

We are called to be salt and light in this world. We must not only understand and commit to a lifestyle that rejects the desires and will of the world and the flesh, but we must be committed to being living examples daily, in the display of positive attributes and practices that clearly demonstrate Christ is not only our Savior, but is indeed our Lord.

This calls for innovative and creative ministry that clearly reflects the heart and character of Jesus. Reflect and journal is a specific way how the ethics of Christ shine in your life.

Involving Others:

The very essence of being the Church is to not only be committed to a life that is counter-cultural, but to live it in a way that encourages and impels others to do the same. In your small group, discuss where you see this being demonstrated, and how you as a group can become more effective in impacting others in a Christ-centered way.

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April 24th Devotional



DISTINCTLY AND DECIDEDLY HIS!

Devotional Scriptures:

John 15:17-21; 17:14-20; Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:11-12; 19; 4:1; Matthew 5:34-43

Study and Reflection:

As you reflect on the teachings and directives of this week's scriptures, I sense you are as *challenged* as I am!

The Church is called to be and live in a unique manner. The agenda of God is something beyond our comprehension or ability. We are called to be "in the world...but not of the world." I often think it is like throwing someone in the pool and demanding that they not get wet! We are taught to identify with God and with Heaven, and to conduct ourselves as *Resident Aliens*. Citizens of the Christian Colony from Heaven. We are called to live, guided and inspired by Christian Ethics, values and practices totally foreign to our natural identities.

Yet the Lord never calls us to something that He has not already equipped us to become and do. Our achievement in Christ is only possible as we genuinely trust and rely on Him. We must indeed be disciples.... learners.... of **Christ**. Our assignment and purpose in this earth is one that is God-given and God-achieved. Our success is guaranteed, but only as we progressively and daily walk and live *By His Spirit*.

Action Items:

According to 1 Corinthians 6:20, we have been 'bought with a price!' We are *Not* our own (thank God). Christ in His love and concern for us, ransomed, bought us back from the slave market of sin and death. We have been redeemed, rescued by a powerful and loving God. Reflect deeply of what this means to you. **How does the knowledge of the incomparable love of God for you affect who you really are?** Let this knowledge and realization empower you to be and live for Him and by His power.

Involving Others:

As we experience the life-changing revelations, of what it means to be His, we should be inspired and encouraged to connect with others of like-faith and collaborate about how *We* are going to develop and expand into a stronger, healthier, more vibrant CHURCH!

LET'S BE IT AND DO IT!!