

Lent 3, 2018 - Be Ye Lights

Ephesians 5:1-14

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“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

A whole sermon wrapped up in one sentence...

I wish I could stop right here, that we could hear these words and act fully upon them, that we could truly love God completely and perfectly with all our hearts and that we could search deep within ourselves to love our neighbors absolutely. Just think...if every human soul could abide by these words of the Apostle there would be no more crime, drug addition would not even be a term in our vocabulary, hunger would be an unknown concept. We could drop our kids off at school without the extra prayer to protect them from whatever violence may occur on such innocent grounds. Kids would not be berating each other on social media (leading some to suicide) and coaxing others into dangerous activities such as eating Tide-Pods would not be headlining our news. Instead we could be building stronger communities devoted to God where people would be happy standing in line at the grocery store fellowshiping with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ! Ah...to walk in love as Christ loves us...can't I just stop right there? No, I can't, but I truly wish we were at such a place in our spiritual walks.

Lent is a time to look at the reality of our situations, not to fool ourselves that we are “okay” because we see others in worse spots than ourselves, less we forget that we are all sinners and subject to damnation outside the Grace and Mercy of Jesus Christ. And Paul makes certain that we are aware of this when he says; *“For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”* We are all sinners...I hope that by now you accept that as a truth. The important question that really needs to be addressed is this; are you a forgiven sinner or...an unforgiven sinner? Is church your benchmark by which

you judge your motives each day? Do you come to the Holy Table of Christ penitentially and worthily? Do you accept Jesus Christ as God's begotten and the savior of mankind and your own soul? Is Jesus in your hearts and thoughts continually as you go about each day? Paul tells us *"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."* A life not centered on Jesus Christ and the cooperate efforts of the church is a life very much in danger of disobedience to God...God did not send His Son so that each of us could form our own interpretations of His message and walk our own paths! God gave power to the Apostles to set the foundations of the church that we could grow in the love and compassion He has for us as a united people. We are not to be partakers of them that would preach a different gospel...a gospel that is man centered and in direct contradiction to Christ-centered truth.

Case in point: Joel Osteen a very popular TV evangelist, boasts of a viewing congregation of over 2 million viewers monthly. People flock to hear him preach because of his, and I quote, "unique thoughts on Christianity." He's a people pleaser! One of these unique thoughts is that "It's God's will for you to live in prosperity instead of poverty." Sounds good to those who live prosperous lives but tough words for the masses around the world who find themselves struggling from starvation and the lack of clean drinking water. Are they failing God and being punished? Our own Lenten appeal from Bishop Grundorf this year is a plea to help the poverty stricken in Dalit India through the spreading of the Gospel and the building of schools. The caste system these children are growing up in is not their fault and neither is their resulting poverty. Is prosperity a measuring rod of God's favor? What is it to be prosperous anyway, a large amount of money...or a content life lived in faith? I can tell you that I am not a wealthy man but I am rich in Christ and would not trade it for all the kingdoms of the earth! Remember, the devil even tempted Jesus with such a gift. Listen in as the gospel of Matthew sets the record straight:

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me,

Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'

(Matthew 4:8-10).

So, should we serve God or mammon? Mr. Osteen makes an impressive salary for a man of God. His main home is 17,000 square feet and cost \$10.5 million. I wonder if like Solomon, he has found no satisfaction in the things of this world? ...There is a reason he is called the smiling preacher, I am sure he is happy with his circumstances. But, we are not to be partakers with them that preach such a gospel no matter how attractive it might be.

In the eighth chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians we find a different take on riches; *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich"* (2 Cor. 8:9). Rich in what? Here we see what it means to be rich in Christ, to be prosperous where it counts. Our salvation is the point of the Gospel and God's actions in Christ illustrate to us the depth of His love for us. He did not accumulate for himself to show us our potential but became the least among us that He could save the lowly. Christ is not concerned with your worldly success and especially the size of your bank account. We are all equal in the eyes of God and through His blood we are given eternal riches.

And how is our spiritual prosperity edified in this world? Paul tells us how:

"But now are ye light in the Lord, walk as the children of light! For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; proving what is acceptable unto the Lord."

St. Jerome puts it eloquently when he says, *"He is goodness in that he gives grace to those who believe in him, not according to their works but according to his mercy. He is himself righteousness in that he gives to each what he deserves. He is himself truth in that he is the one who knows the causes of all creatures and all things"* (Ancient Christian Commentary vol. 8, pg. 187). Without Christ we have no riches to offer those who are in need, but through Christ we can be confident that what we possess is even more precious than we can imagine...and it is ours to share! And share we must! For it is in sharing that the work of the Holy Spirit works in us

to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness. In Peter's first Epistle we are called a Royal Priesthood and a Holy Nation. These titles indicate that we have a responsibility to carry out the ministry of God and share the coming Kingdom with those who remain in the darkness. We are not called to be the ministers of God for our own sakes but for the whole body of Christ! That means loving your neighbor, continually seeking God through prayer and feasting at His Eternal Table. Oh, that we could truly heed those words spoken of by Paul and be "*followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ hath loved us...*" One Holy Nation under God...

We are in serious times and we must remain vigilant. I am going to leave you today with these words from Didymus the Blind. I hope you will meditate on them as your Lenten journeys continue:

"Under the old dispensation, the priesthood and the kingship were two different things. No one could be both a king and a priest. But afterwards came the gospel, which united these two offices in Christ. From this it follows that the people whom he has chosen will be both royal and priestly at the same time. Some people wonder how it is possible, seeing that we are called from all the nations on earth, for us to be regarded as one holy people. The answer to this is that although we are from many different nations, the fact that we have all repented of our sins and accepted a common will and a common mind, gives those who have repented one doctrine and one faith. When there is a soul and heart common to all believers, then they are called one people."

As you go your way today, be wary of false doctrines and false gospels and focus on the truth found only in Jesus Christ, keeping your hearts and minds unified with your brothers and sisters in their several nations and denominations. It is in a common will and a common mind found in Christ alone that unites us as the children and lights of God. Go ye therefore and be lights unto the world.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.