

An Eternal Perspective

A common dictionary description of “power” is the capacity to act or ability to accomplish a purpose. This



Michael K. Olmsted

accomplishment.

Power is exercised on every level of life: in the home, on the job, in the financial markets and in government. It seems the 21st Century church has very little power in our day, mainly because we forget who we serve and his gracious purpose for life. But there are times when I see evidence of Jesus’ followers standing up for oppressed minorities, caring for the poor and disadvantaged and helping refugees fleeing persecution and death – in other words, living out the gospel.

Today, at least in America, the institutional church is recognized as a fixture in our culture, whether it has a God-shaped moral voice or not. But in the days when the Apostle Peter was living, the church was commonly seen as a bunch of radicals who were a danger to political stability, a threat to traditional religion and a people of questionable moral standards. First Peter is a tutorial on what it means to be a follower of Jesus, beginning with: “Place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus is revealed (at the end)” (1 Pet. 1:13). Christians are not powerless and must remember serving God is not defined by the size of your army or wealth, but by your choices, actions and words when the tide of the world is against you.

Whether this letter was actually written by the apostle or is a compilation of his writings preserved by some of his followers, the words are a powerful promise and directive to Christians of every time period. Written to believers in ancient Anatolia (present-day Turkey), covering Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

this encouragement and call to action came when the churches were facing extreme persecution from government and established religious cults.

Peter reminds all believers that we must keep on until the return of Christ, which means we cannot fall back into our former ignorance when we were without Christ. We are to be “(God’s) obedient children”. . . “holy in every aspect of your lives, just as the one who called you is holy” (vv. 14-15). Following this is a reference to Leviticus 19:2, that our identity and power should evidence our connection to God. Then, a series of comparisons between God’s people and non-believers: God judges all people by their actions without favoritism, and you live in a “strange land” (v. 17); unlike the world you have not found spiritual meaning or freedom through perishable things like silver or gold or your ancestors’ practices (v. 18); instead, you have been freed from the world’s false ideas and values “by the precious blood of Christ, like that of a flawless, spotless land” (v. 19).

This powerful affirmation reminds us that we are standing as God’s children in a hostile world that has existed since the earliest days of Genesis: “Christ was chosen before the creation of the world, but was only revealed at the end of time”. . . and “this was done for you” (v. 20). So, this is the final age before Christ comes to usher in God’s kingdom. The promises of God’s grace are as true now as they were before Adam was formed from the dust of the earth. Look back to verse 15: “You must be holy in every aspect of your lives” and connect this with what it means to live as a “holy” child of God in verse 22: “set yourselves apart by your obedience to the truth so that you might have genuine affection for your fellow believers, love each other deeply and earnestly.” There is a grace connection between Christ and all those who follow him, regardless of time or circumstance. The power of God cannot be circumvented or subverted by any other power. Look to the cross for assurance!

The admonition to love one another is a reminder that, although in this world we may face powerful opposition

Formations

August 6, 2017

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-25

as God’s people, we are in this together. I am still surprised when I hear religious voices today saying things in God’s name that are false, even to the point of declaring God is on their side! God’s truth has not changed. His love and grace are constant. There is no earthly government, philosophy, moral theory or power that can overcome the truth of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Any substitute for Christ is a “seed that decays” (v. 23). The “seed that doesn’t decay” is “God’s life-giving and enduring word” (v. 23). “All human life on earth is like grass and all human glory is like a flower in a field. The grass dries up and its flower falls off.” (v.24) “The Lord’s word endures forever. This is . . . good news” (v. 23). So much for the power of governments and self-serving individuals.

The role of all who believe in Jesus is to follow in his example, to not be manipulated by fear or the world’s promises, to live compassionately, to demonstrate God’s love and grace, to trust God in every challenge. Journalists report tragic stories about the persecution of Christians in other nations, driven out of their homes and killed. In spite of all the efforts to rescue those in danger, the record is one of repeated tragedy. Governments ignore the persecution and sometimes participate in the violence.

Are we serving God in our own nation? Can we be silent and true to God at the same time? Will we speak out and offer help? Can we be silent and still claim to be “the church”? Have we forgotten that the power of God can make a difference today and will make the final difference when Christ returns? In the end, all the governments, armies, and claims of earthly power will be reduced to nothing with the appearing of Jesus Christ! Be comforted and encouraged to be the presence of Christ in your world!

Retired after more than 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.