

Honor God

Waiting for a connecting flight in Dallas, I met an old friend headed to the opposite coast. As we sat and visited



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he showed me a popular book he was reading about the second coming of Christ. Obviously fascinated by the book, he asked me what I was reading about the rapture and had I preached on that subject lately. I was very familiar with this end time pop theology and told him plainly that I believe in the literal return of the Savior, but as a Christian we should not be consumed by theories about the rapture because our calling should be to share the gospel with a lost world before it is too late! My friend was not happy with my response.

We conclude our unit on power, the power of God's grace to change a life from the inside out, to show the world the difference God's grace can make. Peter tells us we must honor God by living in the moment because one day the whole world "will have to reckon with the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (v. 5).

The world defines power as success, winning, wealth, and authority over others. But Jesus, who is one with God, presents God's ultimate power in the suffering image of the cross. Peter calls us to "arm (ourselves) with his (Jesus') way of thinking." Why? Because "whoever suffers (as a result of faith) is finished with sin" (v. 1). Living a Christian witness involves humility and rejecting the world's standards of power and success. Jesus went to the cross, not only to give us forgiveness for our sin, but also to demonstrate how God's grace can reshape our flawed lives into something beautiful and powerful. Believers can become so fixated on their assurance of heaven that they forget we are God's children in this moment, surrounded by a world that is living in the despair that is the doorway to hell. Today we can live in a fallen, distorted world, but by faith in Christ we can live in "ways determined by God's will" (v. 2). Peter says that to live as the world lives is "wasted" living

(v. 3). After listing the unbelieving world's "unrestrained immorality and lust" (v. 8), he points out that unbelievers "slander you" because they don't understand how or why you have changed. We should provide answers.

There is a confusing inclusion here after the statement about Jesus judging the living and the dead. Verse 6 says, "Indeed, this is the reason the good news was also preached to the dead." Scholars continue to debate the meaning of this statement. Some say it points to Jesus descent to hell between his crucifixion and resurrection. Others think it reflects the concern the early church had for those who died before Jesus came into this world and thus missed the hope of the cross and resurrection. This is probably a reference to 1 Peter 3:19-20, which is also obscure. Is Peter suggesting that for unbelievers this present state is not unlike living in a kind of hell, or that the tragic flaws of the present are a real warning of what is to come? Is this a reminder that God's love is so deep he grieves for those who choose darkness for eternity? Theories abound, but we will have to wait until heaven's classroom for answers. This verse does not alter Peter's message.

We are abruptly called to attention by verse 7: "The end of everything has come." Rather than a note of doom, this is the announcement that in spite of wickedness and rebellion that corrupts our world, God has put in place not only judgment, but the transforming power of the gospel. Can we see beyond the hopelessness and cruelties of our world to a loving God? We can! Peter tells us how to live preemptively, showing the world God's gracious way of life. We are to "be self-controlled and clear headed," "show sincere love to each other," practice hospitality, "serve each other according to the gift each person has received" and "speak ... as those who speak God's word" (vv. 7-11). This plan for living as God's people requires self-discipline and mutual support within the family we call church.

"Do this so that in everything God may be honored through Jesus Christ" (v. 11). There is no sitting down and waiting for Jesus to return, no

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resignation to inactivity because we see the world lost in sin, no isolating ourselves from all sinful influences. In our loving and our doing there is an attraction for the lost world. Our society promotes the glory of power and success, but the majority never wins those prizes. Many who win one day lose it all the next. The devil's deceptions do not last. God's love is in reality the last word and he gives it generously.

What motivates you? We all have dreams and goals. As a teenager I had read, researched and dreamed of becoming an archaeologist, specializing in Indians of the Americas, planning to study at the University of Illinois. But God got my attention over a long period of spiritual growth, calling me to preach. The idea terrified me, but the result has been blessings and joy. As children of God, regardless of our dreams or career, there is no greater blessing or purpose than sharing God's love with others. We know Jesus will come again, but in the meantime our calling is to live and love in the power of God's Spirit.

A single professional woman in the California church I served asked me to visit her "unbelieving" mother. The daughter arranged the meeting and was present as I answered her mother's questions. There was a lull in the conversation and the older lady told me, "I've made up my mind to accept Jesus as my Savior. Thanks for answering my questions, but that has not convinced me to believe. I have watched my daughter since she was baptized in your church...she is a different person...I want to know God as she knows God!"

Jesus is coming again. In the meantime, we honor God by our words and our actions, in our prayers and our longing, and we invite those around us to experience new life in his grace. This is how we honor God.

Retired after 46 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.