

## Church of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Lesson 2

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- The church has faced some trials over the years
- Thinking about all the persecution that the early church faced
- 2 Timothy 3:12 – *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*
- Thinking about the book of Revelation and 1 Peter amongst others, the early church certainly suffered her fair share of persecution
- 1 Peter 3:15 – *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”*
  - I’ve been guilty of taking that Scripture out of context before, but in the context of that Scripture Peter is talking about suffering persecution for righteousness sake
  - And he says there, when you’re in this situation – you need to be ready to testify why you are a Christian and why you aren’t going to give that up even if it means that you’re going to take some sort of physical persecution
- Now, luckily we don’t suffer like that today and hopefully we never do, but the same concept applies today
- If we suffer persecution in the form of mocking, or exclusion – be ready to stand up for Christ and tell people why you are a Christian
- Just look at Peter for instance – in John 21:18, he was told: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”*
  - And the next verse we’re told that Jesus was speaking of Peter’s future death
  - If you can believe John Foxe, he wrote that Peter was crucified upside down
  - Crucifixion certainly seems to align with John 21:18, but whatever death Peter died – he stretched out his hands and he was carried where he didn’t want to go
  - So it was certainly some sort of a death that was against his will
  - But Scripture indicates that he didn’t back down
  - 2 Peter 1:14-15 – *“knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.”*
  - Even though it was against his will, he seemed to know it was approaching shortly and he was ready to take it
- And I appreciate Peter and the other members of the early church who stood the test of persecution
- It seems as if they counted it as joy when they fell into various trials (James 1:2)
- A lot of them probably rejoiced that they were found worthy to be persecuted in the name of the Lord just like the apostles in Acts 5:41
- And again, I’m thankful for their perseverance through those difficult times and we have to be ready to face whatever persecution we may face as well
- We must be ready to step up and serve Christ regardless of what earthly circumstance we may find ourselves in.
- In our last lesson, we discussed some fundamental attributes of the church
  - We laid the foundation if you will

- We talked about how the Lord's church was established at Pentecost in Acts 2 and that it is still the very same church today
- The word hasn't changed, the gospel hasn't changed – therefore, the church hasn't changed either even though here we are ~2000 years later
- We talked about how Christ was the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11) and He's also the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20-22)
- And you know these building blocks of the church if you will have to be pretty strong, because we're told that this kingdom (the kingdom of the church) is going to stand forever (Daniel 2:44)
  - I've seen some rough foundations
  - They have not stood the test of time to say the least
  - But Jesus as our foundation and our cornerstone – He has stood the test of time and that's always going to be true
- We talked about how the gospel of Christ is of first importance in our lives, and that it is so important that the God who created the universe and everything in it thought that we needed 4 books in the Bible to discuss the life of our Savior – no other Bible character has more than a handful of chapters about him/her
- Christ has 4 books about Him
- Then we talked about some characteristics of Christ's reign
  - How He is the Creator King
  - And how He is the Conquering King
- We concluded with how we have the choice to be a part of His kingdom or not
- And that it is imperative that we are a part of His kingdom, because we have a spoiler alert in the book of Revelation amongst several others: God's going to be victorious in the end over any amount of evil that exists
- There's a relatively brief summary of last week's class
- With the rest of my time with you this lesson, I'd like to discuss how we as members of the kingdom are to be servants of the King
- 1 Peter 2:21 – *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:”*
  - Christ is our example
  - In being His servant, we are to follow His example
- Matthew 20:28 – *“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*
  - Think about that for a moment
  - The one person who has ever walked this earth who was truly worthy to be served just told us that He did not come to be served, but to serve – what?
  - That makes no sense – at least not to our feeble minds
  - Christ knew what He was doing though – He knew His mission
  - He knew that our fate rested on His shoulders – and that's a burden He did not take lightly
  - In Luke 9:51, we're told that Christ set His eyes on Jerusalem – He turned His face to the cross and He must have been thinking: “this is what I must do”
  - God has said that this is the way that lost man is to be redeemed

- Mankind needs a perfect sacrifice and Jesus – you are mankind’s only chance
- And sure enough – He came through
- As if there was ever any doubt
- He was tempted, don’t get me wrong
- In every way that we are tempted, He was – but the difference: He never stumbled (Hebrews 4:15) – absolutely remarkable
- Now don’t get me wrong – though Christ came to serve, God the Father, the Son, nor the Holy Spirit are in our debt
- They don’t owe us anything – but they gave us everything
- The Father’s perfect plan, the Son’s execution of it, and the Holy Spirit making sure that we can read about it and share it with whoever we come into contact with
- **Luke 17:7-10**
  - God is not in our debt
  - Even when we have done everything that we were commanded, we are still in God’s debt
  - When we sin once (one is all it takes is one) – we are guilty of breaking all the law (James 2:10)
  - And we have earned nothing but death (Romans 6:23)
  - This is a debt that we could not pay
  - But we don’t have to pay – because Christ paid it for us
  - To think that God owes us something because we’ve been faithful to Him is absolutely foolish
  - And we simply cannot have that type of an attitude in the Lord’s church
  - God will never be in our debt – we will always be in His debt
  - And constantly praise God for the indescribable gift that He paid our debt (Romans 7:25)
- **Luke 18:10-14**
  - The Pharisee here – “Look at me, God I thank you that I am not like these other men, like this tax collector for instance. I don’t do what I’m not supposed to do, and I do the things I should do. God, you are lucky to have me.”
  - But the tax collector was too embarrassed to look to heaven
  - And he prayed for the one thing that you and I need the most – mercy
  - The tax collector is the one who went home justified
  - Because only in the gospel is mankind justified (Romans 1-8) – not the old law, not the United States, not our jobs, certainly not ourselves, but only the gospel of Christ
  - *“for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*
  - Powerful and true words
  - God is not in need of us – He wants us (2 Peter 3:9)
  - That’s the only reason He hasn’t come back yet is because He’s waiting on as many as possible to be obedient to Him
  - But He’s not going to wait forever
  - And He’s going to win with or without us – He leaves the choice up to us
  - I pray that everyone within the sound of my voice this lesson will make the right choice

- Ephesians 1:3-10 describes us as children of God who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ
  - That's a huge blessing
  - To think that God wants us despite all of our flaws is amazing
  - Our outer garments are described as filthy rags in Isaiah 64:6
  - Mankind's outer covering is nothing but filthy rags – that's what sin does to us
  - And it's an absolute honor that we can be clothed with Christ instead through the waters of baptism (Galatians 3:27)
- God intended us to do work while on this earth (**Ephesians 2:10**)
  - Doing good works in the name of Christ Jesus is what we were created for
  - God prepared this beforehand so that we should walk in this manner
  - What did Peter say to the lame man in Acts 3:6? *“Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”*
  - He made it known that this miracle was not of his own power, but it was in the name of Jesus Christ
  - And I think we can all agree that we must do the same
  - Any time we perform any sort of good work in the community, we must do so in the name of Jesus Christ
  - For any other reason, Matthew 6 would suggest that you are doing it for the wrong reason
    - Matthew 6:1 – *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*
  - Our good works are supposed to glorify God, not ourselves (Matthew 5:16)
  - And when we do not do good for our fellow man, applying the logic in Ephesians 2:10 – we are not doing what we are designed to do
  - What happened to the man who hid his talent in Matthew 25?
    - Vs 26-30 – *“You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*
    - He was thrown out into outer darkness
  - We must be working for the Lord
  - So it was God's intention that we serve, not that we be served
- **Philippians 2:5-11**
  - We've already stated that Christ is to be our example
  - He did not come to be served, but to serve and that's what God expects of us as well
  - Here, we are told that the mind of Christ is to be ours
  - His servant like mindset – that's to be our mindset
  - Romans 12:1-2 makes it very clear
    - It is reasonable, it is logical to submit your lives to Christ

- Do not be conformed to this world, rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind and serve God
  - Philippians 2 goes on to tell us that Christ was equal with God
    - We talked last lesson how He was present at the creation
    - Colossians 1:16 – *“...All things were created through Him and for Him.”*
    - 2 Corinthians 8:9 describes Christ as being rich – we know that was not earthly riches because His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36)
    - Otherwise, the servants of the kingdom would not have allowed Him to be crucified
  - But Philippians 2:7-8 tells us that despite this, He made Himself of no reputation
    - Taking the form of a bondservant
    - Becoming a man
    - Humbling Himself
    - And being 100% obedient even to the death on the cross
    - Again, going back to 2 Corinthians 8:9 – we’re told there that even though Christ was rich, He made Himself poor
    - And He did this on our behalf
    - So that through His poverty, we may become rich – even though we don’t deserve any part of that
    - John 15:13 – *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*
    - Romans 5:7-8 – *“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*
  - Christ was obedient, Christ was a servant even to the point of death
  - And we must be the same
  - Revelation 2:10 – *“...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*
  - We started by discussing persecution briefly and how we don’t necessarily suffer physical persecution in VA today
  - But if we ever do – we’re told that we must be faithful even to the point of death
- **John 13:3-17**
  - Perhaps the second greatest example of servitude in my opinion that Christ gave us (second to His death on the cross) was that of Him washing the disciples’ feet
  - Look at vs 3 – *“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God,”*
  - God had given Him everything
    - All authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18) except over God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:27)
    - Christ had all of this
    - Again, if anyone was ever in a position to be served, it was Him
    - But here we find Him washing the disciples feet instead of them washing His feet
  - But He gets to Peter in vs 6 and Peter questions Him
    - *“Lord, are you washing my feet?”*

- Christ's followers clearly did not understand everything at this point, but at least Peter on this occasion realized the significance of what Jesus was doing
  - And Peter realized that he should be washing Christ's feet, not the other way around
- But Christ told Peter that he does not fully understand yet, but that he would later
- And I know that Peter eventually did fully understand, but just not quite yet
- And to Peter's credit, he says to Jesus "if you have to wash me, then don't stop at my feet – wash my hands and my head too"
- If we are not washed by the blood of the lamb, we're going to get what we deserve instead of mercy – and I know that nobody wants that
- On the day of judgment, I do not want what I deserve, but I want to be seen as clothed with Christ
- And the only way that we can be clothed with Christ is by being obedient in the waters of baptism (Galatians 3:27)
- Allow yourself to be clothed with Christ in baptism if you haven't already and keep yourself clothed with Christ by serving faithfully
- Jesus tells the group in vs 14-15
  - *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."*
- I think we can all agree that Christ was the ultimate servant
- And that's what He calls us to be as well
- The church is now the means through which God wants to act and be represented in the world (2 Corinthians 4:6-10)
- And we can do so, by following a few guiding principles found in the Scriptures describing characteristics of the Lord's church
  - 1 – we are to serve peacefully
    - Matthew 5:9 – *"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God."*
      - I think we all want this to be said of us – that we are peacemakers
      - Peace is a characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)
    - Romans 12:18 – *"If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men."*
      - You have to make peace you – it's simply a characteristic that must define all members of the church
      - God is the God of peace and He wants the same for us
  - 2 – we are to serve compassionately
    - We all know that gospel means "good news"
    - And it took great compassion to provide us with the gospel
    - There's no doubt that Jesus embodied compassion (amongst everything else), and He is our example, so we must embody compassion as well
    - Like peace, it's a characteristic that we just simply must have
    - God has always a soft spot in His heart for those who can't take care of themselves

- Matthew 25 teaches us that we are to serve our fellow man – give him food, water, clothing, visit him, etc.
  - Taking care of widows was very much a thing in these times
  - There's perhaps a surprising amount of references to the church's responsibility of taking care of widows in the Bible (James 1:27, Acts 6 are two NT references that come to mind) – when an older woman's husband died in these days and if she didn't have a son who was of age to work and bring home the bread so to speak, this woman was in trouble
  - If you remember when we first met the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, Elijah found her gathering sticks
  - And when he asked for bread, she told him *“As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”* (1 Kings 17:12)
  - Let's move beyond the physical realm and think spiritually again
  - The debt of sin is a debt that we cannot pay on our own – our sin leads to death (Romans 6:23)
  - But through God's loving compassion, He redeemed us (Romans 5:6)
  - Though we may have different roles physically in this life, we are all equal in the fact that we need a Savior to pay that debt for us (Romans 12:4-8)
  - God is also the God of compassion, and He wants us to possess that quality as well
- 3 – we are to serve as part of a transcendent kingdom (above the range of normal – definition)
    - Acts 4:12 – *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*
    - We've discussed at length that we cannot purchase or earn our salvation on our own
    - Remember, Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8 – he tried purchasing the ability to pass the Holy Spirit to people via the laying on of the apostles' hands
      - Not told exactly what he wanted it for, but a very reasonable possibility is that he wanted this ability so that he could then make a profit off of it
    - But Peter told him the following: *“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!”* (Acts 8:20)
    - And then Peter ordered him to repent
    - There's nothing that we can do to earn our salvation – rather we must simply submit to Christ and His saving power
    - We are called to be holy (Romans 6:1-4)
    - Though we are in the world, we must not be of the world
    - And even if the world tries to get in our way, we must serve Christ at all costs (1 Peter 2:13-17)
    - And if we do that, we'll be rewarded in the end (1 Peter 5:10)