

Live A Quiet Life

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- [0 : 00] Fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. And it's only a part of that verse. And it says, Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.
- Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. Now, others have tried to get closer to the Greek text by suggestions like this to penetrate that verse.
- Study to be quiet. Make a point of living quietly. Seek restlessly to be still.
- Make it your driving ambition to have no ambition. That's how they try and get hold of what St. Paul is saying to us.
- Now, you're really only hearing half the sermon this morning. We haven't got time for the rest. The first half was preached on Friday between 12 and 3, when members of this congregation, who had spent six weeks trying to fathom the profundity of Isaiah 53, shared their findings.
- [1 : 34] And in five, what I thought were very perceptive talks that we had, members of this congregation, people that are sitting in the pew with you this morning, had these five things to say.
- First was, that in the world of secular literature, common sense is masquerading as the profound.
- We need a massive reorientation, which must begin at the cross of Christ.
- The second person said, our world is a world that loves the music, but doesn't want to know the composer.
- A third person said, when I minimize sin, I no longer understand the cross.
- [2 : 38] Another person said, our world responds to the cross with a massive, who cares?
- and went on to say that our world, that Jesus on the cross did not cry out at the intensity of the physical pain which he endured, but he did cry out in the agony of the spiritual pain when he said, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
- Our world has pretty well mastered physical pain in its brutality, not altogether, but we've made massive steps.
- But our world is in a terrible agony of spiritual pain that touches all of us and we're trying to ignore it.
- The final thing that was said was that God's reconciliation through Christ, what God has done through Christ, is not with our best selves, but with our worst selves.
- [4 : 03] The gospel is the story of God's extravagant forgiveness. And I must say that I am hesitant to preach to a congregation that has such an understanding of the cross.
- But maybe some of you don't, so I'll talk to you. That's why I want to talk this morning about how we do respond to the resurrection. I mean, it's all very well in him to say, Jesus Christ is risen today.

It's all very well in the creeds to say, on the third day, he rose again. It's all very well to read the gospel story from Mark. It's all very well to read the implications of that story when it hit the community of the Thessalonians.

But what about us? How are we to respond to the resurrection? I mean, it can't do less than turn your world upside down.

And most of us spend most of our time and energy keeping our world right side up in the dreadful fear that something might happen. And so I think it's significant for us this Easter morning to be told by the scriptures in words that I don't understand.

[5 : 29] I really find I rebel against that. I belong to this culture, to the activism of it, the aggressiveness of it, the pride, the greed, the sense of accomplishment, the technological revolution that we're going through.

All that is just in my bones and in my blood and in my flesh and I feel it very strongly as I know you must. So what does it mean when the scriptures say make it your ambition to lead a quiet life?

I can find a thousand objections in my heart and I expect about at least 560 from Europe. You see, for what Paul was trying to say to the Thessalonians is that Christian life is not an orgy of false enthusiasm or misdirected zeal, which is what most people associate with the gospel.

Make it your ambition to live a quiet life. I think it would be interpreted as lie down and die if you want to know what the resurrection is all about.

Nothing could be simpler than that. We live in our world struggling for the pinnacle of our ambition in the western world has been wonderfully described as each person deserving 15 minutes of fame and we spend the whole three score years and ten trying to achieve it.

[7 : 09] It's not that. It's not somehow justifying our proud little lives. It's not a kind of meteoric flash in the night sky which is our life the whole of it.

It's very much closer to lie down and die. Remember at Christmas we talked about the fact that at Christmas we celebrate light at midnight at Easter we remember darkness at noon death at midday and that's what it calls us to.

You see when you drive the streets of Vancouver this morning you can celebrate the wonder of the blossoms the magnificence of creation.

I had planned at this point in my sermon to have the sun streaming in through the windows but in the absence of please use your imagination.

But it is a magnificent day and we on such a day in such a city at such a time surrounded by such beauty cannot but help to celebrate the creation.

[8 : 36] It's there. It's magnificent. It's complex. It's wonderful. It's mind absorbing. It's refreshing. It's renewing. It gives you zeal.

It gives you purpose just to see the glory of creation. But the Christian faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the beginning of an altogether new creation.

All the gorgeousness and loveliness of the creation that surrounds us is dying. You can read that in every newspaper in the world I suppose now.

That creation is finished. It's dying. But God has begun his new creation by raising Jesus from the dead.

something new has begun. And Paul says if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. You remember that when God finished creating the world he rested the seventh day just to enjoy the creation.

[9 : 58] we don't have any time to enjoy the creation anymore. Besides we've moved it to the first day of the week. So what we do on the first day of the week is we make it our ambition to live a quiet life even for one day in seven not just to celebrate the creation but to anticipate the new creation which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

You see we can't bring about the new creation. We can by God's grace be good stewards of the old creation in holding it together for as long as we can but we must do that in the faith that God's purpose in the midst of it all is to bring in his new creation.

We've got to let one die in order that the new creation may begin and where does that start? It starts in your life and mine when we make it our driving ambition to live a quiet life.

Our job is in faith in the new creation to hold together the old creation to bring to the old creation faith in a new creation.

creation. That's what it means to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. It means something for a whole world. But as I told you, this evidence of the beginning of the new creation gets from our world a massive shrug of the shoulders.

[11 : 47] Who cares? We watch the thing die without faith in the new creation. We need to be quiet and allow God to do his work rather than in a frenzy to try and do God's work for him.

Which is what we've taken upon ourselves to do. Is to create the world in our own image, to serve our own purposes, to fulfill our own greed and satisfaction. And it's a frantic task.

And we're terribly stressed with it. But when we sing on Easter Day, the strife is over, the battle is done, that battle is the battle that ends all battles.

That is the ultimate victory. That is establishing in the midst of the old creation the reality of the new creation by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And the reason we are to study, to make it our ambition, to live a quiet life, is in order that God may begin his new creation in our lives, in our community.

[13 : 05] That's what we're all about, is to allow God to begin to carry out the work of the new creation. God, I, the church needs to be a place of contagious quietness.

It needs to be a place where, and I confess that this church is a place of frantic busyness so much of the time, but here we need to get in touch with, to study, to make it our ambition, to live a quiet life.

The Lord is risen, therefore, make it your ambition to live a quiet life. A quiet life allows you to be creative.

A quiet life allows you to know God. A quiet life becomes a source of strength to you. A quiet life allows you to know that your neighbor is there, longing to be loved.

All those things are the results of a quiet life. A quiet life is, in a sense, a situation in which God's new creation can begin to manifest itself.

[14 : 29] And the desperate need we have, and I hate to remind you of this because I have to remind myself that the great struggle for the new creation can't begin anywhere but in you.

You might be able to do many valiant and glorious and wonderful things in other people's lives, but God's purpose is to begin his new creation in you.

And in order for God to do that, you have to make it your ambition to live a quiet life. Let me just give you one last picture.

Jesus, who, as one of us, faced the cross and death and entombment, and as he lay dead in the tomb, God manifested his glory by raising him from the dead.

On Friday, we had the church absolutely stripped of everything, everything that's ornate, and one child came in and looked at the church and said, it feels like a tomb.

[15 : 57] God granted it may be a tomb, a place where we die and await the new creation to bring us to life.

Not a place where we struggle to hold on to what we have of life, which is so little anyway, but a place where we can make it our ambition to be quiet enough to allow God to do the work of his new creation, even in our own hearts and lives.

So I suggest that what we need to look at this Easter day, in response to the glorious affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that our appropriate response is in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 11, make it your ambition.

to live a quiet life, that God may manifest the reality of the new creation in the circumstances of your life.

You see, lots of people want the church to help them hold the old world together. The church's task is to tell people that a new world is coming.

[17 : 22] may God grant that we be loyal to that task to which God has assigned us when Paul writes to us and says, make it your ambition to live a quiet life.

Amen. Let us kneel to pray.

As you kneel, if you could take the wine colored prayer book in the pew. We want now as a congregation of God's faithful people to contemplate his gracious actions towards us and to listen to what God the Holy Spirit would say to us.

Father, this morning we have heard your word proclaimed. we have seen in our mind's eye Christ portrayed before us as crucified.

We are about to taste the body and blood of the resurrected Christ in the bread and wine of the Passover feast. And we have wondered at your awesome power demonstrated in your son's victory over sin and death.

[19 : 12] Father, as we ponder the significance of these things for our lives, we give you thanks that you have chosen us not to be an elite group, but rather chosen us and set us apart to live lives of holiness and humble service, called to live together in a community concerned for your glory and for the welfare of our brothers and sisters in this world.

Lord, we pray that you would enable us to listen to you in fulfilling the great commission that you gave before you went to be with your father, Lord Jesus.

God, we would listen to know how we individually and collectively can be involved in bringing your light to all nations.

blessings. If you turn to page 41 in the prayer book, as we think about our responsibility to proclaim the knowledge that we have been given, we pray this first prayer together.

Almighty God, who by thy Son, Jesus Christ, did give commandment to the apostles that they should go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, grant us, who is called into thy church, a ready will to obey thy word, and fill us with a hearty desire to make thy way known upon earth, thy saving help among all nations through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[21 : 46] Amen. Father, we think of our nation and of our city.

We think of the cynicism which seems to be undermining our democracy. we think of the national divisions in this country, the deep ones. We pray that you would speak to us, giving us wisdom, giving us courage to pray for those in authority.

Lord of all power and mercy, we beseech thee to assist with thy favor, the prime minister of this dominion, and the premiers of the provinces.

Cause them, we pray thee, to walk before thee in truth and righteousness, and to fulfill their office to thy glory and the public good, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Lord of all you, amen. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, send forth, we beseech thee, upon thy servants who bear office in this city, the spirit of prudence, charity, and justice, that they may in all things walk before thee with steadfast purpose and a single heart, and faithfully serve in their several offices, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[23 : 37] Would you turn to page 44? I will pray, and there will be a time of silence, and then we will pray the prayer for the parish.

God the Father, we do entreat you, that in this parish you would send forth your Holy Spirit, that you would help us to listen, how that our lives of quietness might speak powerfully to people around us, that the light of your gospel might shine forth from this community, that we might be salt and light in the city.

we acknowledge that without your power, we can do nothing. But we acknowledge that you, working through us, can do far more than we can ask or think.

We now pray together. O God, the Holy Ghost, sanctifier of the faithful, sanctify this parish by thy abiding presence.

Bless those who minister in holy things. Enlighten the minds of thy people more and more with the light of the everlasting gospel. Bring erring souls to the knowledge of God, our Savior, and those who are walking in the way of life.

[25 : 16] keep steadfast unto the end. Give patience unto the sick and afflicted, and renew them in body and soul. Guard from forgetfulness of thee those who are strong and prosperous.

Increase in us thy manifold gifts of grace, and make us all to be fruitful in good works. O blessed Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together we worship and glorify, one God, world without end.

Amen. Amen.