

Don't Waste Your Patriotism

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[0:00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! on a theme based out of John Piper's book, Don't Waste Your Life.

And many of us have read this book, been stirred by this book. But the reason so many of us appreciate this book is not because it's innovative or novel or something like that.

Piper is not an author interested in drawing our attention away from the Bible. Instead, his writing makes us want to pick up the Bible and read it even more with fresh vision, with a fresh awareness, a fresh desire to live in light of reality.

In his book, Piper writes, God created me and you to live with a single, all-embracing, all-transforming passion. Namely, a passion to glorify God by enjoying and displaying his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life.

[1:31] So if we're supposed to live with a passion to glorify God in all the spheres of life, then we're going to invest just a few Sundays to explore some of these specific spheres of life.

So how can we live with this vision? In our patriotism, for instance, our singing, our table, our time, and our sport. So it is my joy to turn our attention now to the greatest book.

I will read this passage and at the end I'll say, this is the word of the Lord and you can respond by saying, thanks be to God. So would you please stand as we hear God's word addressed to us.

First Peter, chapter 2, starting in verse 9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

[3:00] Beloved, I urge you as sojourners in exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may take your seats. Well, the World Cup is in full swing.

[4:24] And many of those games are being played right here in the U.S. Nations from all over the globe have gathered to compete for the cup. And for those of you who are like, what's the World Cup?

It's soccer, okay? Soccer. Or football in the rest of the world. It not only brings teams from all over the world together, it brings fans from all over the world together.

And there's been an interesting phenomenon. I don't know if you've seen this, but people from all over the world are experiencing the U.S. for the first time. Many videos have gone viral as people visit Walmart.

They get gas at Bucky's and they eat Mexican food for the first time. I have to admit, I got a little misty-eyed watching a European eat Texas brisket for the first time.

I saw British people in awe of the chicken sandwich with Chick-fil-A sauce on it. The Australian girl walking through a Bass Pro Shop just blown away by the number of hats and dead animals.

[5:35] One South African man, he was amazed by walking through a local park and he kept commenting about how well manicured it was. And he just couldn't believe that there were benches without graffiti and that there were women just walking alone.

He couldn't believe it. He was baffled by this level of safety and security in this particular park. These people, they were enjoying our culture.

They were enjoying our place. They were enjoying our nation. I couldn't help but feel just kind of this renewed sense of satisfaction and thankfulness for belonging to this nation.

I know you probably feel the same. But is it right? Is it right to have a sense of patriotism?

A love for the nation? Is it right to have an allegiance to the nation? How much hope should we place in our nation or the leaders of our nation?

[6:45] What if our history is riddled with sin? Is it more godly to kind of dismiss and distance ourselves from our political or geographical or cultural place?

We are citizens of heaven after all, right? Or is it more godly to immerse ourselves in politics and national interests?

America is a Christian nation after all, right? Right? Or do we embrace the four F's that you see on shirts at Dollywood?

Faith, freedom, firearms, and family? Is that what we're about? Well, in many ways, our text this morning, it deals with similar questions.

The stakes were high for these new believers. Jews and Gentiles were leaving their former relationships, their former cultures, their former lifestyles, their former allegiances.

[7:50] Their ambitions, their hopes have been transformed by a common Savior. But now these suffering Christians, they were wrestling with how their identification with Jesus reshapes how they think and live in the world around them.

Jesus is now their king. But how does that impact their lives? Their hopes, their loves, their allegiances?

What does this mean for patriotism? Well, it seems that this text and others give us some real help on how our identity in Christ informs and orders our hopes, our loves, and our allegiances to king and to country.

I believe that the main point for us this morning is this. We are to live for Christ, the king, by leveraging our earthly citizenship for the good of God's people and the display of God's glory.

We're going to walk through this text with an eye towards citizenship in three points. And the first point is this. We are ultimately citizens in God's kingdom.

[9:19] We are ultimately citizens in God's kingdom. Just look at verse 9. Peter says, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

Who's the you that Peter's addressing in this verse? What's fascinating is that Peter applied these titles of identity to this eclectic group of both Jews and Gentiles together.

And that's striking for a couple of reasons. First, it's striking that Jews and Gentiles have both been brought together into one new group.

That's striking by itself. This new grouping is not based on ethnicity, culture, language, or shared history.

In fact, these people are from different ethnicities and cultures and languages and histories. In the past, these people would have been, at best, apathetic towards one another.

[10:39] And at worst, enemies against one another. And yet, Peter finds it appropriate to look at this wildly diverse group and write, chosen race, a gathering of people, a holy nation.

He's highlighting something scandalous here for us. He is giving identity markers for this new group. What we see here, and in other places throughout the New Testament, is that the binding agent of this chosen race is not ethnicity.

It's not bloodline, but faith. Faith. In other words, there are only two kinds of people that Peter is concerned about in the world.

The dividing line is here. Those who know Christ and those who do not know Christ. That is the dividing line.

Their essential nature, their essential identity is wrapped up in that question. Know Christ or don't know Christ. And the other reason that this is really striking, that Peter uses these titles, is because Peter is actually reapplying titles from the Old Testament Israelites to this diverse group of Christ followers, Jews and Gentiles.

[12:07] In verse 10, if you look, it says, Peter writes, Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. This is a reference to Hosea now being reapplied to Jews and Gentiles, united by faith in Jesus Christ.

If you remember, Hosea was a prophet of God who was commanded to marry a prostitute. Why? It was to symbolize and to act out God's relation to unfaithful Israel.

In chapter 3 of Hosea, God demonstrates his scandalous love for his unfaithful bride through Hosea's pursuit of his prostitute wife, Gomer.

Gomer had strayed so far from her husband that she had become a slave. And yet, at great cost to himself, Hosea pursues her.

And he buys her back off of the auction block. Just wrap your mind around that. Like Hosea did for Gomer, God bought back what was rightfully his to begin with.

[13:46] At great cost to himself, God pays the price of our redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. God's grace.

And it's not just to take us off this auction block and make us his slave. He redeems us in order to deliver us from the slavery of sin and into a loving relationship with our faithful and gracious God.

That's what he's done. It's scandalous grace. Our sins, they are many, but his mercy is more.

Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people. And so Peter reapplies these titles from the Old Testament with their fullest and their richest meaning as they found their culmination in Jesus Christ.

If you, this morning, are united with Jesus Christ, then this right here is the foundation of who you really are.

[15:04] This is who you really are. You're not only a chosen race, you are a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Both of these titles are reapplied from Exodus 19 after God freed the Israelites from slavery.

Slavery in Egypt. And then he makes them into his special people. That priesthood, it consisted of a group of people able to enter into the presence of God himself and to make acceptable sacrifices.

And now Peter is saying, you are a priesthood. You, as Christians, Jew and Gentile, if you are in Christ, you now have access to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And then he says that these Christians united in Jesus Christ are a holy nation. Notice that he does not apply this title to the region and he does not apply this to a political system.

He does not say Galatia is a holy nation or Rome is a holy nation. He applies it to a people. You are a holy nation.

[16:27] To be holy means to be set apart for God's purposes. And these people, they no longer belong in an ultimate sense to themselves or even to an earthly entity like their earthly country.

They have been set apart from sin and death for God. So to be a Christian is to be in God's possession.

We belong to Him. And this nation, this idea of a nation is to be a people bound under a common rule.

So Peter here is not writing to a civil magistrate. He's not addressing a geopolitical Christian nation. Peter is writing to a people scattered among the nations.

living in different regions, but living under the ultimate authority of Christ as their king.

[17:40] He's writing to Christians in local churches. That's who holy nations are. So when you see a reference to God's kingdom in Scripture, it should not primarily be understood in terms of a place or an earthly political system.

Instead, it's better to understand as people under God's kingship, under His kingly rule.

When you see kingdom, think kingly rule. So when you go to a foreign country and you see a U.S. embassy, that embassy is actually under the rule and authority of the United States.

Even though it's geographically in another country, it's under a different rule. In a similar way, a Christian is like a mobile embassy in a foreign land.

He has redeemed us and we are under His rule and His authority. And as followers of Christ, we are a holy nation under the kingly rule of God regardless of where we are in the world, regardless of what our earthly political system may be.

[19:11] So right now, His kingdom is expressed in part through the submission of His people to His rule. But one day when Christ returns, all sin, all rival authorities on earth will be subjected under His rule finally and forever.

That's what's coming. So if you are in Jesus Christ this morning, then these are the pillars of your identity. Before we are Americans, if you are a Christian, then we are sinners redeemed by the scandalous pursuing grace of our God and Jesus Christ.

Regardless of our ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, or cultural differences, we are united in Christ as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.

If you are not a Christian this morning, thank you for being here. You may be an American like many of us are, but these identity markers that I'm describing do not describe you.

These are not for you. You are not a Christian by being born in America or by attending church, but you can become a Christian this morning by trusting Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin.

[20:43] And I invite you to do that even now. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. And if you are a Christian this morning, then these identity markers of who you are in relation to God, they must be firmly established before you can rightly understand who you are in relation to your earthly citizenship.

this has to be in place. Second point, we are temporarily sojourners and citizens in this world. Just look at verse 11 with me. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Christians, in one sense, you and I, we are sojourners and exiles. What is that?

What is a sojourner and exile? It's one who belongs to another kingdom, but is a temporary resident in another one. We see this language in the Old Testament again and again.

[22:05] It's applied to the people of God when they lived in a foreign land under the pagan rulers in Babylon. It's intended, this language is intended to draw out the reality that our primary allegiance is to a different kingdom and king.

So we may be walking in the same area geographically, but our motives, our loves, our allegiances are going to spring from a different source than merely earthly interests.

So the language of being a sojourner and an exile, it prompts us to a level of discomfort here. There should not be a seamless fit into any citizenship including ours here.

One test might look like this. If you extracted your Christian identity, could you still be content?

Because even in a good country like we have with better health care and education and quality of life and freedoms, there should still be a longing for God's righteous reign and submission to his good designs and perfect justice and the abolition of all evil.

There should still be a longing for that kind of kingdom to be established. There should still be a longing for a new and better country. There should be dissonance to some degree here and now.

[23:53] Now even though our primary identification is with our heavenly citizenship, this does not mean that we are to be bitter or cynical or apathetic toward our earthly country where we live.

That is a danger because the biblical evidence suggests that exiles, even in the Old Testament, should not be hands off but rather be those who promote the good of the nation, even a pagan nation.

And to do so is an expression of obedience and devotion to God himself. I mean, even in the context of exile, God's people, think of Jeremiah, God's people were called to build, to plant, and to procreate, even in their exile.

In other words, they were called as God's people to bring forth life and to be a source of godly flourishing in their society, everywhere they went, even in a pagan place.

So in a sense, these sojourners were mobile embassies, bringing kingdom ideals and influence wherever possible. So in a country where we have a significant amount of influence and voice, it is right for us to bring God's word to bear on every aspect of our society so that both we and the people we're around, Christian or not, can flourish according to God's good design.

[25:40] God, there are some of you in here that may be called to have a more direct influence on policies through things like lobbying and running for offices.

We praise God for that. But all of us, all of God's people are called to live out the ethics of God's kingdom as citizens of heaven sojourning in this place no matter where we are.

Every one of us, we're called to embrace and to live in the good of God's design in our marriages, in our families, in our businesses, in our coaching, in our interactions with our neighbors.

Now, this might come as a surprise to you, but look at verse 13 with me. Peter says, be subject to every human institution, emperor as supreme or governors.

You see what he's saying? Christians are being told to subject ourselves to earthly institutions. And it says the sojourners are being told be good citizens.

[27 : 04] Christians. That's what he's saying. So when Peter wrote this, just keep in mind the Roman emperor was Nero, who is a notorious tyrant who severely persecuted the people Peter's talking to.

So the command to submit is a call to respect the office of authority, not just a blind endorsement of personal morality.

authority. Okay? So you may be confused. You might be thinking, I thought we were exiles who belong to God's kingdom. So what's this?

Yes and no. Yes, yes, we are citizens of heaven and our ultimate allegiance is to God. But we are also citizens of an earthly nation.

religion. We have been redeemed from within a particular place and a particular people. So our primary allegiance is to God and his kingdom, but our secondary allegiance is to our earthly nation.

[28 : 13] We have dual citizenship. Dual citizenship, but they are not of equal weight. Okay, what is the relationship then?

Of our primary heavenly citizenship and our secondary earthly citizenship. We have to remember that it is by God's providence and for God's purposes that all the nations were created.

He made them. And what's more, it's by his providence and his purposes that he placed you exactly where you are.

God created it. He created the nations and is sovereign over every detail of their rule and their duration.

How long the kingdoms last. We see that in Acts 17. In fact, even the rulers, even the kings, are under God's sovereign power.

[29 : 21] Proverbs 21. The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will. In other words, God is working all things according to the counsel of his will.

including the leaders and political systems, even the bad ones, and it includes the United States. You know what? That's really good news.

That's very relieving to me. Because trusting God's sovereign power and providence in this area, it can change your life. Some of us, we watch the news and we just, we come away just anxious or angry or suspicious.

And I think the worst part is that the mass majority of the news that we take in is just information that has virtually no impact on our day-to-day life or relationships.

And we have no power directly to do anything about the majority of what we hear. just think about that for a second. I'd encourage you to think through both the volume and the content of your news feeds and your podcasts.

[30 : 48] Are you really changing anything or are you the one changing? Are you more anxious and angry and suspicious?

Let me encourage you, God's sovereign purposes in the world are not thwarted by this or that leader being in office. He's not scared. God's not trembling on his throne.

What would happen, brothers and sisters, what would happen if you reallocated your energy and your effort over here to prayerful attention to the relationships that are immediately around you where God has placed you both in your community and in your church?

church? What would happen? How would that transform your day-to-day? How would that transform your impact in this world? My friends, God has instituted governments as a mechanism to restrain evil and to promote good.

Just look at verse 14. We see the God ordained role of civil authorities is to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. God made it so that submitting to this order, it actually helps maintain a stable society.

[32 : 09] It protects the church. Believers in Christ, our orderliness, our submission, our honor, our good will toward others regardless of who they are, it's intended to silence our rivals.

Of course, I know there's red flags going off and people are saying, well, what about the limits to our submission? Yes, there are limits. Our default needs to start here though. The limits are, the Bible doesn't mandate absolute obedience.

We see that from Peter, the very same writer, and other apostles in Acts 5. If a human law directly commands a Christian to disobey God's laws, the higher allegiance is always to God.

God. So that's also clear. So in other words, we should not have a blind patriotism that says, everything the government does is good, I approve.

Nor should we have a cynicism that says, it's all bad. People who are cynical towards their country will not be willing to sacrifice or protect or defend her.

[33 : 30] And thank you if you have defended our country. Thank you. These anti-patriotic attitudes, if left unchecked, they will actually erode the ability of a nation to function effectively, and it will eventually undermine the very existence of the nation itself.

So we can have a legitimate love, a legitimate concern for our country without blind approval that undermines our heavenly citizenship or scathing cynicism that undermines our earthly citizenship. neither of these honors the Lord. Neither one. Even citizens of countries with evil rulers can have a genuine patriotism combined with sober and truthful criticism of current or past leaders.

I want to be able to preach this sermon in Somalia as much as in the United States because the truth is transcendent and applies to all Christians everywhere. German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was familiar with this tension and as both a Christian and a German during the Nazi regime Bonhoeffer was repulsed by the evil actions of his country but he also loved his countrymen particularly the Christians in his country and at one point he had the opportunity to leave Germany and to find refuge in the United States however he eventually felt convicted and compelled to go back home for the sake of both his heavenly and his earthly citizenship and this is what he writes I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany

I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people isn't that amazing his primary citizenship as a Christian allowed him to accurately see the evils being perpetrated this is wrong and at the same time it compelled him to work for the good of his fellow Germans to spread the gospel that was his driving ambition it cost him his life to go back but Bonhoeffer died a long time before this as he famously wrote in his book the cost of discipleship he said when Christ calls a man he calls him to come and die Bonhoeffer living in this world for another world third we live with dual citizenship for the mission when we see that we have a dual citizenship we should not think that these allegiances are necessarily two equal forces competing for time and attention even in our earthly citizenship we still submit ultimately to the

[37 : 06] Lord verse 14 be subject for the Lord's sake verse 15 this is the will of God verse 17 fear God honor the emperor side by side so our love and our allegiance to the Lord is not necessarily in conflict with our love and allegiance to our nation in fact it informs our love and our allegiance to our nation think of it this way I love my wife I want to be faithful to her I want to be willing to lay down my life for my wife and people would not accuse me of idolatry if I express love for my wife or I sacrifice for her that would not necessarily be replacing God but if I try to love my wife instead of God if I put my hope in her as my ultimate satisfaction this would be taking a good thing and make it into a God thing idolatry we need a properly ordered love in order for me to love my wife rightly

I actually need to love God more and to love my wife through my love for him does that make sense so in a similar way we need to appropriately order our citizens we must be careful not to let love for country overshadow God's purposes our love of country can become a distorted idol if we don't rightly see the order and goal of our dual citizenship we must love our nation through our love for Christ and his purposes and at the center at the center of God's purposes is not America God's glory and his global people that's what's at the center the church the church so as much as we love our nation

God's purposes in the world are not dependent on America God's glory once said it this way before America was here the church was here after America is gone the church will be here so our hope is not ultimately in our nation our hope is Jesus Christ Jesus Christ our goal is God's glory going global through his people the church that is our driving ambition no matter where we are verse 12 keep your conduct honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and do what glorify God glorify God that is the goal that God might be glorified might be glorified notice in verse 16 live as people who are free not using your freedom as a cover up for evil but living as servants of

God free to serve free to serve before our salvation we were not free we were not free we were enslaved to sin the freedom Peter is talking about is the liberating grace of the gospel believers are no longer bound to the shackles of sinful desires Christ has freed us from sin and death in order to

serve God with all of our being freedom is not it is not autonomy and independence to just do whatever you feel the goal of freedom should not be to isolate ourselves it should not be to have less interference in your life and the things you want to do if you are a Christian then you are free to be a servant of God to bring him glory recently Abe Trott and I had the opportunity to go to visit a sister church in Nairobi Kenya and we spent a lot of time in the airports and it's interesting just to watch and to one flight where we ran into some other

Americans and even though Abe and this other guy both had American passports I could not help but notice how differently they acted from one another the other guy was clearly buzzed even before he got on the plane he was loud he was obnoxious he was making demands he was creating a scene he was just contrarian but then I watched Abe and waiting for others he is holding doors for people he is helping little Muslim ladies in Turkey put their bags in the overhead he is reading Christian books on the flight because he wants to grow and he wants to mature it was a striking difference that I saw you can see the dual citizenship on display in Abe's life these guys are from the same country have the same rights but imagine this when a person like Abe comes to Christ he is redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and now belongs to

[42:44] Christ's kingdom it's as if his passport has been dipped immersed in Christ's blood and even though the earthly citizenship remains this person clearly belongs at another level at a greater level to Jesus Christ so all that is earthly in this citizenship can accomplish is submitted to the ultimate king and his purposes in the world so whether you're a citizen of of Naiota or of Nairobi verse 17 it summarizes the shape of a Christian patriot look at it it says honor everyone love the brotherhood fear God honor the emperor look at those we are to honor all people because they bear God's image that's why they're at camp joy this week that's why we go to other places in the world that people bear

God's image not only does this motivate dignity and respect we also work for their flourishing in our society in our community by God's design that's what we're up to we honor all people friends we we must love the brotherhood he's talking about the church talking about other Christians in other words we must deeply love and live for the church the local church this this means that we strive to serve the church both in America and those who belong to Christ across the globe there are fellow citizens at an ultimate level and their family in the kingdom of God for all eternity this place is going to evaporate and be gone one day either it will be or we will be but Christ's people will last forever forever we must reserve our ultimate and reverential honor for

God alone all that we do is angled to bring honor and to praise and to glory in him and we have to honor our earthly leaders it's a form of obedience and honor to God that we work hard to submit to authorities God has established so that our families and our church and our community and our nation can flourish because of our godly presence in this community so how can you and I waste our patriotism I'll tell you how be a cynic be an isolationist be self centered be anxious be overly hopeful and political leaders be America centric be uncommitted to the local church be apathetic to your local community be unconcerned about the proclamation of the gospel how can you and I not waste our patriotism allow our identity in Christ to inform and order our hopes our loves our allegiances to both king and country and then we live we live for Christ the king by leveraging our earthly citizenship for the good of God's people and display of God's glory let's pray together father we come to you our king humble ourselves before you can't believe that you rescued us from sin and made us a people set apart a holy nation would you be honored in our lives here in this community as we use our citizenship to bring honor and glory to the king of kings in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message at a

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