

1 Peter 1:17-21.

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Your Reality is Made Different in Christ

God tells us in his word that our lives have meaning. He tells us that we are so precious to him that we have been bought with the blood of Jesus and now we are called to serve the Lord in reverent fear. In the opening verses of his first epistle, the apostle Peter describes our existence, our eternal reality as those saved by the risen Christ, and he describes it in this exuberant and glorious way! ***3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*** The Risen LORD has given us new birth, a living hope, and the joy and assurance of eternal life, and Peter makes the point that this will have an effect on the way that we live our lives.

As Peter writes to his fellow believers who have been given this new birth and this living hope he encourages them to endure hardship as they consider the wonders that God has done for them in Jesus. He encourages them to live their lives for God, to be holy obedient children who thankfully serve God our Father. And Peter also passionately pleads with his readers to avoid the trappings of a sinful world. This section of scripture before us today starts in this way: ***7 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.***

This would have certainly been fitting words for his original audience in Asia minor. What consolation or help could the Gentiles in Asia Minor expect from a Greco-Roman pantheon of false gods who were often described as being just as corrupt, power-hungry, jealous, vindictive, and violent as human beings? Many of these first century residents of the Roman Empire believed that three beings called the fates held their destinies in their hands, and these fates only favored a few heroes who would be rewarded with paradise. This was the empty myths and traditions, the empty and hopeless religion that was

handed down to these people. And the culture of the day, even though it included the great and rational minds of Greek philosophy, didn't have much else to offer either. On the one hand, there was a stoicism that grimly endured life's miseries out of a sense of duty. On the other hand, there was a philosophy of life that lived for emptiness and pleasure - which sounded a bit more exciting - but this too was proven to be empty. No wonder Peter was so excited to share the good news of a new birth and living hope that comes through the resurrected Jesus. No wonder he calls them with such exuberance to live their lives as strangers here in reverent fear and announces that they have been liberated from the empty way of life handed down to them from their forefathers.

What do you think of when Peter talks about *the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers*? As you think about life in the world today what emptiness is being passed down from generation to generation. For whatever reason my mind jumps to the "reality" show mentality that has found its home in the lives of people in our world today. A number of years ago the format of reality shows became popular and since then it has become common to turn on the television and shows like Survivor, or Big Brother, or the Bachelor, from week to week would follow people around with cameras and televise their behavior. However, if you have ever watched any of these shows it is rather evident that the "reality" found in these shows often is manufactured. This manufactured reality often aims for the dramatic, the over-the-top, the excessive. Such shows seem to celebrate bad behavior relishing in those moments when participants indulge in empty and shallow conduct as they shamelessly pursue pleasure or they give in to vile, indecent, or just rude and boorish behavior. It may be just a form of entertainment, but it leads a person to wonder about the effect that this type of programming will have on the next generation that has grown up with this as something that is regularly broadcast into our homes.

Occasionally we may see someone in our family, in our community, go down a path that mirrors those dramatic and overtly shameful ways. Our hearts may hurt for those whose lives have been dragged into such empty directions. The mindless pursuit of pleasure, the brokenness of a life misused, a life torn apart by drugs or alcohol, gambling or shameful endeavors, are examples of an empty way of life. Because of the sad results, it is not that difficult for us to see that this type of life is empty. We quickly confess any sins in this regard and we ask God to keep us from falling into such obvious sins.

As we consider this concept of an empty ways of life that are being passed down through our sinful culture, what about a life that finds value in the relentless pursuit of acceptance and approval from peers. Whether that is a teenager engaging in unhealthy social media activity in the tireless search of acceptance, or a full-grown man or woman searching for the same type of fulfillment through social, or at work, or at home. Such behavior may be a little bit more difficult to identify as empty or futile. But what is the end game in such pursuits, to do and say or post enough things to validate one's presence

and importance is an unending pursuit that so often leaves a person unsatisfied or at the very least unsure and uncertain in their value or significance.

And what about that which seems to have a bit more moral substance, but is a life devoid of God. What about the man who has a family, a wife, kids, and holds down a good job and has paid off the house and the truck? Certainly, that is a life full of meaning, right? That is the standard the world has set, that kind of sounds like the American dream. But perhaps it is no coincidence, and all too fitting, that we call such a life a dream. For really, how long will that dream last. In such a scenario, life may go well for a while, but problems and mistakes, pains and missteps, unavoidable disasters and unforeseen setbacks, injuries and illnesses, might interrupt and end that dream. Even when things seem to go well, if assessed honestly, such a dream of a good life, even this has a fleeting value to it all. You can see it materialize with every aspect of life, the beauty that you once had will fade, the car will break down and need to be replaced, the kids you spent so much time with and so much time on will grow up and move out. The house will become too small or too big for your needs, it will fall into disrepair or it will be sold or moved out of. The job that he will once held down so ably, so proudly, will eventually be one more thing that he used to do. Your roles will change and things that seemed to give your life meaning will not always be there.

My aim is not to poke holes in your dreams or let the air out of your sails this morning, but the goal is to bring to light this reality: the things of this life that seem to give meaning to our life are only temporary. But in Christ our current and eternal reality is changed, in him our reality is different, it is special, it is always meaningful. In Christ, we have a meaningful existence here, and we are blessed eternally, for our hope and faith are in our eternal God. Through faith we know that it is God in his goodness gives us these things we enjoy here in this life. He is the one who blesses us with such wonderful gifts as friends and family. He gives us the gift of work and the ability to connect and socialize with each other. He shields us and protects, cares for us and watches over us and strengthens us when difficulty comes, when the circumstances of life change and challenge. In all of this God cares for us and so we are to live our lives knowing that God is watching. God is watching, not in some frivolous reality show way where we try to get him to pay attention by acting out, nor do we live good and holy and pleasing lives because we are consumed with an endless pursuit of his approval, but he is watching with eyes of our heavenly Father who loves us. And because we know that he is watching and because we have been blessed with the knowledge that we are loved, that we are treasured, we live in thankful obedience to our father. We live in a reality that is full of meaning and purpose, hope and joy.

But how do we know that we are treasured by God? When everything changes and life has this uncertain value to it, what is there to show that we have value, that we are important, that we are treasured by God? If the roles that he calls us to, if the blessings that we enjoy, if all of this lasts for only a few years, for a few decades, what is there to

assure us that there is more, that our life has lasting value, that life has meaning? Well, God tells us through his apostle. Your life has such value in the eyes of God that he spared no expense to make you his own. Not even silver or gold or the most precious of earthly treasures was used to bring you into the possession of God, but God chose to purchase you with something that never loses value, never fades in importance. He bought and purchased you with the priceless blood of Christ and now we are liberated from sin and hopelessness and we are set free to serve our God with purpose, with meaning. And we find happiness and joy in serving our Lord as our faith and our hope is in the eternal and trustworthy God.

The very fact that God warns about the pitfalls of elevating the temporary things of the life to that which defines or determines our self-worth or happiness shows that he values us and he is concerned about our well-being. He does not care to see us get sucked into the black hole that is formed when we put our hope and our faith entirely in earthly matters. He does not care to see us crushed by such pressures or left disappointed and hopelessness when things change and decay. Instead the same God who with equal parts power and care cast the stars and planets into place, sends forth his holy Word to give us perspective on what really matters. In his Word God had his servant Solomon share with us his wisdom concerning the emptiness and futility even in the most extravagant standards of life. The Lord Jesus himself once told a parable that is recorded for us in Scripture, about a man who had a good and comfortable life, who had plans to tear down his barns and build bigger ones and live life comfortably, but Jesus called him a fool because he did store up treasure for himself in heaven. Such a life as good as it might seem is short-lived and ultimately empty reality if it is one without Christ.

Through the gospel, Jesus gives us a reality that is different. He gives us life that has lasting value and meaning. He gives us a life that is full, that has lasting value, and eternal meaning is one that is wrapped up in Christ. It is a life that is different. We live as strangers in this world that is so filled with emptiness for we have been given new birth into a living hope. We have given the gift of faith that gives to us a life that is flush with color and pumped full of meaning and purpose as we live our lives for him who died for us and was raised again.

And so dear friends be renewed in this blessed reality as we listen again to the words of God given to us through the Apostle Peter. ***7 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*** Amen.