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Life In Two Kingdoms: by Ben S.

1 Peter 2:11-17

Peter is writing to believers in Northern Turkey as 'elect foreigners and exiles' just like Daniel, Esther, Mordecai, Ezra and Nehemiah who lived as exiles in Babylon far from their true home in Jerusalem. The church is called God's chosen beloved exiles. The church is far from her true home in heaven living in an earthly kingdom. Peter writes about how we live our lives in two kingdoms. First century believers were living as citizens of Heaven under the rule of the Roman-Turkish Empire. Jesus was their king while Nero was their emperor. How are we to live as servants of our divine king Jesus and yet under the authority of Boris Johnson and Mark Drakeford?

Remember how Daniel and his three friends respectfully asked for permission not to defile themselves with royal food and in the end the king found no equal to these young men. They were attacked and slandered but their enemies could find in them no corruption or negligence. God blessed their witness in exile very powerfully. Peter (2:11 & 12) says while we live in exile, "abstain from sinful desires that wage war against our souls" and focus on living good lives. In chapter 4:3 Peter adds another negative list to the things in 2:1 that will enslave us, preventing us from experiencing close fellowship with the body of Christ. The positives are in verse 12, "Live such good [beautiful] lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good [beautiful] deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." When the church seeks the help of the Holy Spirit to live beautiful lives God uses that as a powerful witness to establish an environment where people are drawn in to listen to God's word and be converted. He is glorified on that day of visitation.

Peter expects Christians to be slandered (v12-13) if they are being faithful to Jesus. Their response to slander was to be the same as Daniel's: no anger, insult, intimidation or fear. The result would be "that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people". (v15) Just living a beautiful life muzzles the critics of our Christian faith. More than that, by the power of the Spirit people come to believe. This is a puzzling life to the people around us. We don't join in with certain things and that irritates people. But we love and care for people. It's a puzzle. They try to work it out. 'Why don't you live like us?'

How should we relate to human authority? "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right." (v13&14) Our divine King commands us to submit to earthly sinful rulers that he has put in place for a time 'for his sake'. We respect our earthly rulers because we revere our king Jesus. Submission to earthly government is not a weakness. It takes strength of character. It's obedience to Christ.

This was likely written during the reign of Nero (AD 54-68) an insanely cruel leader who killed Christians for sport and had them burned as candles to light up his garden. Peter says we are to be respectful to everyone in society including the emperor and his greedy, corrupt provincial governors. (v17) Respect is a rare quality in our modern culture. People are not respectful to those who have a different opinion. The exiles in the Old Testament are such good examples of this. Jeremiah 29:4-7 says, "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and

daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." We too as Christian exiles in this world are called to seek the welfare of our towns and nation. We are to pray to the Lord for the peace and prosperity of the places where we live and work. Churches are to be a faithful praying presence in the societies in which they live: engaging positively, working helpfully, loving sacrificially. Nehemiah and Daniel both addressed their kings respectfully, "May the king live forever". They didn't wish them ill, only good. But they did not fear their earthly rulers. They feared the Lord their God and always put him first. We fear God, We honour the emperor. At times Daniel and his friends said no to the ruler. They quietly and respectfully refused to worship the golden image or pray only to the king. They would not sin against their heavenly king. As much as they honoured the king, they feared the Lord of Heaven. Similarly, it was treasonous not to worship the Roman Emperor. But there are limits. We are called to take a stand when obedience to earthly governors means disobedience to God's moral law. The proclamation of the gospel trumps human authority. (see Acts 4) How has your heart responded to the rules imposed on us during lockdown? Some responded with resentment and hatred. It is fine to disagree with the government or be angry with some decisions it makes. Governors are sinners who are not interested in glorifying God. But they do provide structure for the good of society and prevent the complete breakdown of law and order. Many do care even if they don't believe in Jesus. Be on guard, hating and dishonouring our earthly leaders is not the way of Christ. Some have gone the opposite way trembling at everything the government says. Would you ever have the courage to disobey our leaders if they said you could no longer worship Jesus or talk about sin and hell? Do you need to pray you would be willing to go to prison? Or do you need to pray for more respect for leaders?

While in exile love the family of believers. "Show proper respect to *all* people, love the family of believers, honour the emperor. " (v17) Christians are not to withdraw from society or organise resistance. We are called to be citizens of heaven living in the world. We are not moral policemen forcing unbelievers to live like Christians. There is no such thing as a Christian nation. ("My kingdom is not of this world.") We are called to take a stand, to love one another without hypocrisy, to be a faithful presence, as good citizens who serve and love our neighbours. We need to focus on ourselves as Christians living like Christians. The real power is not Christian politics, it is little groups of believers scattered amongst the nations seeking by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to live faithfully for another kingdom. Our motivation is for the 'Lord's sake'. Jesus Christ is our motivation and our power. Our leaders are under the authority of Heaven. The greatest ruler is just a vaper. Every kingdom of this earth eventually crumbles but there is a kingdom where Jesus is the king of kings that lasts forever. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord because he has all authority in Heaven and on earth. He uses all his power for our benefit. That's what a true monarch looks like. He gave his life for us so we can be brought into the kingdom of Heaven. He is our power, our motivation. May God increase our faith and manifest his power among us.