

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, September 5, 2024

Today is Thursday, September 5 and we are studying what the Bible says about doing good in the world.

OPENING PRAYER

As I approach these first fifteen minutes of the day devoted to the Lord, I pause and become still. I take slow, deep breaths and focus my entire being on the presence of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I eliminate surrounding distractions, quiet the noise of my mind, and listen for the voice of the Spirit speaking to my soul. Blessed Lord, I worship and praise You in the quiet stillness of the morning. Help me hear the message You have for me today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:9-12

REFLECTION

Peter's first letter was written to Jewish Christians exiled in Asia Minor in the first century A.D. The believers lived in a foreign country far away from their homeland and were prevented from worshiping in their sacred Temple in Jerusalem. They lived in a pagan community, surrounded by pagan religious art and idols. Pagan temples and shrines were everywhere and people sacrificed to many false gods. Peter exhorted the exiled Christians to live Godly lives in this ungodly, heathen society. Even though the surrounding culture misunderstood them, ridiculed them, and was violent and hostile to the believers, Peter reminded them that their words and actions were a witness to the people around them.

I imagine what it would be like to live in an ancient pagan society, ridiculed for my beliefs in the one true God and persecuted for my worship of Jesus the Messiah. I consider how that is the same in today's culture and how it is different. Peter speaks of pagans who accused the Christians of "doing wrong." Despite their incredible disbelief, the pagans were moved to glorify God for one reason alone - the way the Christians lived their lives. Their love and good deeds were evident and noticeable. I examine my behavior in the world and wonder what non-believers see in me. I recall the lyrics to the hymn, "They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love." Is that true of me? Will people know I am a Christian because they see my love?

I listen carefully for the Holy Spirit to reveal what God is saying to me personally through this section of Peter's letter. In what way do I sometimes feel like a foreigner or exile because of my faith in Jesus Christ? I consider what an honor it is to know that I am a part of the people of God, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's special possession. I recall times in my life when I lived in darkness, desperately needing God's good mercy. I name the sinful desires which have waged (and/or continue to wage) war against my soul. How do I rely on God's power at work in my life to live well? How do I rely on relationships in the Christian community to help me attain victory? Is God's love reflected in my outward actions and behavior? I want my words and actions to glorify God and pray that he will empower me to live a life of holiness and inspire me to do more and more good deeds.

Ask: How do I demonstrate my love to the world? Will non-believers glorify God as a result of my love and good deeds?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, thank You for choosing me and naming me Your "special possession." Thank You for calling me out of darkness into the glory of Your wonderful light. I rejoice to be called Your child and am grateful for the gift of Your mercy. Through the power of Your Holy Spirit, I ask You to guide me into holiness, and enable me to abstain from sinful desires. Enable me to live a life that brings You glory so that others get a glimpse of Your love. Come, Holy Spirit, lead me into holiness of heart and life. Instruct me in Your ways so that I may lead a Godly life even though I am surrounded by a disbelieving culture. Use me as a witness of Your great love so that others will come to know You. I want to live a life that glorifies You. Amen.