



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

**SERMON - 4TH EASTER I PETER 2:19-25
APRIL 30, 2023**

"YOU INVITED ME HERE FOR THIS?"

Looking very much like members of the 1960's sex, drug and rock n roll culture, a band called "Three Dog Night" went to the top of the pop charts with a song entitled "*Momma Told Me Not to Come.*" It was about a party and the sorts of things that happened at that party - "*This is the craziest party that could ever be ... don 't turn on the lights, cause I don 't want to see.*" "*Momma told me not to come ... that ain't the way to have fun, son.*"

It was rather remarkable for a group that looked like party animals and whose songs were staples at parties to write about how "the party" wasn't all it was cracked up to be. If this is what fun is, I want no part of it. Even among rockers, it's understood that what the enticements of this world promise they usually fail to deliver. But what about the Christian life - doesn't that make good on its promises? Does God invite us to a party - which is how Jesus often described the kingdom of God - only to 'bait and switch' us and once the lights are up, we recoil and say "You invited me here for this?"

That was the immediate question Peter addresses in today's lesson. Verse 18 tells us what verse 19 is referring to when it talks about a "gracious thing" - being a slave, particularly with a harsh master. This apparent acceptance of slavery causes consternation among Bible readers - first off that the Bible does not condemn the practice, but worse, that such a condition might be referred to as a good. As Abraham Lincoln famously said about proponents of slavery in America - "*We never hear of the man who wishes to prove the good of it by becoming a slave himself.*"

Lincoln's wry observation helps us interpret I Peter 2:18 - none of the writers of the New Testament advocate for, or were ambivalent about, slavery. They addressed the reality of it and called it what it was - suffering. Peter takes the reality of slavery and then turns it into analogy. Now he turns his attention to us. If your master, sin, leads you to be punished, you deserve it. What good is it if you do evil and suffer for it? But Peter says you have been called to live under another master, Jesus, and to live a good and godly life. If you behave like the rest of the world, and find the party isn't all it's cracked up to be ... well, your heavenly father told you not to party like that!

But if the lights are turned up on this world by the eyes of your faith, and you see the emptiness and futility of living according to its standards, and you repent of that and still suffer, either for your good behavior or because in a sinful world suffering still knocks on lots of doors, you have experienced a "gracious thing". Some translations use the word "commendable" here - the Greek root is actually "grace" - but Peter uses it to mean "*enhancing the esteem of those who display such endurance.*"

In Peter's day, household slaves, much like schoolboys today, would often compete with each other to see who was the toughest. They would disobey some command of the household master in order to be punished with increasing severity to show they could "outdo" other slaves!

Dumbest thing I've ever heard of, but then again, sin so blinds our eyes that we hear every day of people practically inventing new perversions as if to say, "*hah - top that!*" Rarely do the lights come up soon enough for them ... and us to see what these folks are inflicting on themselves.

Pastor Peter in this great sermon of his says "*The lights have come up for you. You live in the light of God's unmerited grace and favor. So walk in it - to this you have been called*", adding "*Christ left you an example so that you might follow in his steps.*" In their song "Momma Told Me Not to Come" the band Three Dog Night concludes by saying "I've seen so many things I ain't never seen before. Don't know what it is, but I don't want to see no more."

I'm not sure that qualified as a form of repentance - the boys probably didn't "know what it was" - but you do. You know what is right and pleasing to God. You have Christ. You have the example he set for you. You practice charity, mercy, truthfulness, self-control, kindness and you are willing to suffer for doing so, not for the sake of suffering itself but because Jesus' suffering for you makes any of yours for his sake godly - a commendable thing, a gracious thing. That is what Peter is getting at in our lesson.

And as we said last time, the world will think you are strange for this - that you can, and will, endure people rolling their eyes at your behavior - mocking of your beliefs and your way of life. But take heart - that is what Christ endured as he entrusted himself to the only God, who one day will turn up the lights big time, revealing his way and truth to all, and those who through the darkness chose to walk in his marvelous light. And you will be glad in that day. AMEN