

Independence

Introduction:

- I have had the opportunity to travel to many different areas and countries and there is something that I have noticed. People are pretty much the same all over the world.
 - It's true that we may look different. Have different colored hair and skin. Speak different languages. Eat different foods. But those are all fairly superficial differences.
 - But when it comes to the important parts we are more alike than we are different.
 - Go to most any county or region and talk to people (And by that I mean the ordinary common people – not politicians and national leaders). Ask them what they want from life. And the answer you will get is that they want to be happy. To have meaningful employment, something that makes a difference and adds to the human experience. To be able to live in peace. Have a place to live and food to eat. To educate their children.

P1 Genesis 18:1-15 (The Lord Appears to Abraham)

- V-1 (*God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the "gods"*)
 - I think that we all find it comforting to think of God in heaven presiding over the heavenly courts. God being in charge. And we especially like that part about God judging (others) because we all know that there are **LOTS** of people who are in serious need of heavenly judgment and punishment.
 - God is in his kingdom and all is right with the world. That's what my mother used to say – generally when she had a positive view of the day. The meaning is clear that when God is in charge, that when God is on the job, all is right with the world.
 - We have the general sense or hope that in a world in which God is in charge things will be fair and equitable. All people will be able to realize their dreams. Clothe, house, and feed their families. And one of my personal favorites – play with their grand children.
 - But what is this business about “judgment among the “gods”?”
 - Some commentaries suggested that the “gods” were human judges – but that raises the question of how they appear in heaven.
 - Other commentaries suggest that the “gods” are man made idols. Things that we put before God. That this psalm is an illustration of the first commandment “You shall have no other gods before me”
- V-2 (*How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?*)
 - That makes a lot of sense when we read this second verse.
 - There is no question that many of the false gods (or idols) that we humans worship are unjust.
 - Throughout the bible there are frequent condemnations of the rich.
 - Partially because of how some people acquire and use their wealth. The tax collectors of Jesus' day certainly fit this category.
 - They were rich – but not because they earned their wealth. They grew rich on the backs of the ordinary people because the Roman government said the taxes are thus and such but you can keep anything you collect above that amount. So they used the threat of the Roman forces to extort money from the common folks.
 - Then there was the rich man that lived so well he never noticed the beggar Lazarus sitting at his doorstep.
 - The other reason that there are so many condemnations of wealth is that it has a way of seeping into our minds, into our hearts, and eventually into our souls.
 - I am sure you have heard someone quoting scripture saying that money is the root of all evil. The problem is that is not what it says. What the scriptures actually say is that the love of money is the root of all evil.

- 1 Tim 6:10 (*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*)
- When our entire focus is on acquiring more and more wealth we soon find ourselves worshiping at the altar of our own making, forgetting and ignoring God's first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me"
- V-3 (*Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.*)
 - One commentary that I read suggests that this passage is a commendation of our misdirected worship. That social and financial injustice exist because of our serving lesser gods who do not have the high moral standards. There is more than a little truth to that idea.
 - However, I prefer to read this line not as a condemnation but rather as a plan of action. A call to arms. Here is something that we can do to impact the lives of others and make the world a better place in the process. Defend the cause of the weak. Maintain the rights of others – even the poor and the oppressed. Even, and perhaps especially people who are different than us.
- V-4 (*Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*)
 - Someone once commented that in order for evil to triumph is for good men (and women) to do nothing. To sit the game out, watching from the sidelines where it is safe.
 - There are risks to getting involved. But the risks of doing nothing are greater.
 - Take a few minutes this week to think about that. Ask yourself where would we be or what would the world look like if 232 thousands of men and women had decided not to get involved. Where would we be and what would the world look like if hundreds of thousands of ordinary men and women just like us had listened to the voices of fear and not stood nose to nose with Hitler's forces saying, "This far and no further."
 - This verse certainly carries a message, a mission, and a call to action. However, it is also a powerful reminder that when even the mightiest of people and nations stand before Satan and his forces we are the weak and the needy and it is God through the person of his son, Jesus Christ who defends, delivers, and redeems us.

Conclusion (A call to action)

- *232 years ago a many of the colonists felt that King George and the British government did not have their best interests at heart. That all they cared about was the wealth they could extract from their colonies in the Americas. Things got so bad that the King's policies started effecting those quality of life issues I mentioned in the beginning, so some of them banded together and demanded justice from the King. They vowed to use force if necessary to throw of the tyrannical rule of King George and the British government.*
- *It was simply a matter of knowing that there was something better and being willing to make the sacrifices needed to get it.*
- *Nearly two thousand years ago God looked down at the sorry state of affairs here. God heard and saw how God's people were being oppressed by Satan and were suffering the consequences of their sinful and sin filled lives.*
- *Because God had created the world God knew that there was a better way for people to live. God knew all about the suffering of God's people, so God sent his son to live as one of us, to be tempted as we are, and to die on the cross not for anything he had done but for all that we have done.*
- *July fourth is the day when we celebrate the birth of our country and celebrate our independence and freedom. It is right and proper that we set aside some time to celebrate our freedom and to thank those who secured it for us by the shedding of their blood. It is even more fitting and proper that we set aside some time each week to worship our God, a God that so loved and loves us that he sent his only son to die on a cross that we might have life and have it abundantly.*
- *Make today and every day independence day. Throw off the shackles of sin and claim the new life offered through God's unending and exuberant grace.*