



Week 2

March 8

Brandon Terry

Arsenal Hill ARP Church

1 Timothy 4:4-5

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving for it is made holy by the word of God in prayer.

Most Bible-believing Christians will agree that God created everything and that everything he created is good. But, there is a question that comes to mind in relation to this reality and that question is, "What does *everything* consist of?"

Let's ask an easier question, "Did God create culture?" Well, let's see...God created mankind. After God created man, he told him to fill the earth and subdue it. How was Adam supposed to subdue it? When God told Adam to name all the animals, what was Adam supposed to name them? There's no record of God telling Adam what to name them. But, Scripture does say that Adam named the animals what he desired. What Adam chose to name the animals before God was a good thing. Adam was creating a culture and that culture was good.

What wasn't good was Adam and Eve's selfishness, which led to corruption. God gave Adam and Eve the liberty to subdue the earth in the manner in which they saw fit as long as it didn't betray his statutes. Men and women all around the world, today, are still fulfilling this mandate in the ways that have been passed through generations in their particular context and new ones too, and these ways are not merely amoral, but they are good. Whether it's music, fashion/style, dance, cooking, style of speech, dialect, style of worship, in and of themselves they are good. It is our hearts that pervert

culture. Selfishness perverts our own cultures and it makes us think our culture is better than others. No culture is better than another. Listening to rap music is good, wearing Keens is good, making quinoa is good. The problem is the heart, so let Jesus handle that; ours as well as others because they both need his handiwork.

Questions for Further Study

1. What does today's passage teach us about the character of God?
2. What are some other passages of Scripture that also teach us this?
3. How does today's passage and devotion lead you to pray? How does it lead you to act?

March 9

Rev. Chad Reynolds

First Presbyterian Church of Lake Wales

Isaiah 60:1-3

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising...*

According to our family story, my great-grandfather owned some land near Wilmington, NC, which he sold after falling on hard times during the darkness of the Great Depression. My own grandfather eventually desired to buy the land back, but his employer would not loan him the money to do so. His friend then encouraged him to move to the Charlotte, NC area where there was more opportunity. So my grandfather packed up his family and headed for the "brighter light" of a life and career there, eventually settling in Rock Hill, SC.

My grandfather chose to migrate to an unfamiliar place, to live amongst a largely unfamiliar people, in order to have a better life. Isaiah 60 envisions a mass migration of the nations to Mt. Zion, fleeing the thick, spiritual darkness in which they dwelled, in order to come to the better life that is the light of Christ, arisen upon His people. Praise be to God that this prophecy has been and continues to be fulfilled when people from all manner of tribes, nations, and tongues come to faith in Christ Jesus. As those who have already migrated to Jesus by grace through faith, may we the Church seize the

opportunity to love and minister to modern day refugees, immigrants, and wanderers who are looking for a better life, by pointing them to the marvelous light of Christ.

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March 10

Christian May

Tirzah ARP Church

Philippians 3:8

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.

As I survey the social and political landscape of our nation and world, my heart breaks. Not because I live in disbelief that the circumstances of humanity are outside of the reach of my God and King, nor because I am unaware of the depths of the complete brokenness of mankind. My heart breaks because of all of the things that we believers cling to over Christ as a mainstay of our identity and the divisiveness that it creates among us. We hold to our political beliefs, our financial standings, our denomination, and race more than we hold to Christ.

Can we as a whole say that these things consistently take the back seat of our identity when compared to Christ? I ask because I am guilty of this very sin. When we do as Paul says in Philippians 3:8, all of the things we believe make up our identity become rubbish. When we do as the hymn says and "we turn our eyes upon Jesus looking full in his glorious face, the things of this earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." When we fully let go of the identities that we have created and been born into and fully cling to Christ as our identity, then we can reach across those lines and love our brothers and sisters across denominations, financial standings, race, and even political beliefs. Then we can create the Church that John speaks of, the Church that worships together, the Church that anxiously awaits the return of her God and King, in unity.

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March 11

David Kimball

Neely's Creek ARP

Romans 1:8-12

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

Ask anyone who has participated in part-time cross-cultural missions, and they will almost certainly agree: the experience is life changing, world altering, and heart shaping. So much so, that it is almost a cliché that the Christian returning from a short-term missions trip will gladly, humbly admit about the experience, “I got so much more than I gave.”

Certainly, this was my experience in Rwanda in the summer of 2015. Our team gave food to starving families, we visited widows and orphans, we prayed for healing and protection over the huts and houses into which we were invited, we led VBS, we played with needy children. Yet, in seemingly every circumstance, I found myself humbled by the faith of my Rwandese brothers and sisters that dwarfed my own. I was blessed to receive prayers for my family from the families for whom I had been asked to pray, and I was awed by the strength of individuals whose daily reliance on the Lord is far beyond my understanding. Wanting to give, I received.

Does this seemingly selfish result in any way undermine the legitimacy of cross-cultural, part-time missions? Certainly not! To the contrary, Paul suggests that we should expect what he calls “mutual encourage[ment] by each other's faith” as an ordinary-yet-supernatural byproduct of communing with our brothers and sisters in unfamiliar cultural surroundings. For this very reason, he “longs to see” his Roman brothers and sisters. So uplifting—so encouraging it is to join hands and hearts with another human being with whom you do not share the same language while yet knowing that you share the same Savior.

This mutual encouragement of our oneness in Christ is just one of the many benefits that our loving God is happy to confer upon those who participate in cross-cultural missions. Do you long to be encouraged in your faith? Prayerfully consider cross-cultural missions and the mutual encouragement brought by helping our brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world.

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March 12

Dominique "Neek" Smith

Jacksonville, FL

Cultural Anthropology and the Second Greatest Command

1 Corinthians 9:19, 22b

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them... I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

I moved my family to one of the most economically poor and neglected neighborhoods in the U.S. because I believe followers of Jesus are servants of their neighbors. Jesus connected Gospel love to servanthood in the 13th chapter of John's Gospel account in verses 14-15 and 34-35. Paul is drawing a similar conclusion here in 1 Corinthians 9. The way in which Paul makes himself a servant is by becoming aware of and adjusting to his surrounding culture. This takes becoming a disciple of culture. I imagine shedding his culture of origin, his familial and ethnic habits, and personal preferences was often uncomfortable for Paul as an apostle to many different people groups. Yet, Paul was willing to become "all things to all people" in order to see the lost saved from sin to a loving God.

If we, the Church, are to be a culturally and ethnically diverse Church, it will take being uncomfortable. It will take setting aside our cultural inclinations and personal preferences. It will take leaving the safety and comfort of our neighborhoods and going to places where no one looks like us. It will take getting used to music, language, food, etiquette and economic concerns not similar to our own. In short, serving the way Paul served will take placing yourself in the place of the "other," whoever that may be. May the Lord fill us with a love bold enough to leave our cultural comforts to go across train tracks and oceans for the sake of His colorful Bride.

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March 13

Rev. Greg Conover

Bradenton, FL

1 Kings 8:41-43

Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.

Many of us may think that God's plan of salvation was initiated for the Israelites alone, then in Acts 1:8, Jesus commissioned the Church to be a global Church, reaching all cultures. While it is true that the Church is called to reach people from all nations, this is not new. God's heart has always been a missionary heart, caring for all peoples to repent and have saving faith in Him.

We see this in 1 Kings 8. Here, Solomon is praying during the dedication of the Temple and note what he prays:

- That foreigners would come from far away nations (v. 41). That different cultures and races would come to the Temple to worship! Worship would be multicultural. This was to be intentional as they hear of His great name. And this was due to evangelism as they hear of His great name.
- He prays that God would hear the prayers of the foreigner (v. 43).
- He asks God to hear their prayers so that the whole earth would know and fear God (v. 43).

God's heart has always been a heart for the nations. In the Old Testament, it was "come and see" and now it's "go and get." In 1 Kings, Solomon prays that the foreigner would come and worship. In Acts we read of Jesus' command to go and reach the nations. And in the end, we see His heart and the work of His Church where we will all be together

worshipping. Revelation 7 is the reality of I Kings 8: Revelation 7:9-10 says, *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”*

The question we need to ask: Does my heart and my church line up with the heart of God?

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March 14

Elinor Griffin, Refugee Ministry Coordinator

Story: *Great Things He Hath Done*

I remember the first time I thought, “This is what heaven will be like!” It was in a worship service in Wales, UK. That day my team and I worshiped with Welsh believers as well as international students from a nearby university, African students who worshiped in their native tongue. Together we sang, “To God be the glory, great things He hath done, so loved He the world that He gave us His Son.” His Son...His Son brought us home to God when we were lost in sin, and He also brought us together - believers from three different continents, with different languages, cultures, and accents reconciled to God through Christ.

I learned that day that ministry *to and with* multiple cultures matters because our God is too glorious to be worshiped by only one. In every corner of the world, God is displaying His majesty in languages, communities, colors, cultures, art, music, and traditions. All of these together will never be enough to express God’s glory this side of heaven, but it’s a foretaste of what we will see and experience when we get there. The beauty of Christ’s gospel is forgiveness that makes all things new, restoring what was broken and reconciling what was separated - our relationship to God and, as a result, our relationship to each other. Isn’t it beautiful to think that the many language differences that were a consequence of the Tower of Babel are being redeemed by our God to proclaim His goodness throughout the whole world? One day, all of those languages will worship together at His throne because of Jesus (Rev. 7:9).

Recently, my church had a fellowship meal with a Korean congregation that shared our church building for the past seven years. As we ate and talked together, I was reminded of that first eye-opening moment in Wales. That Sunday in Wales was just the beginning of the joy I've received through spending time with people of other cultures, overseas and in the U.S. Just as God is using people from many cultures to further His Kingdom in this world, He's used people from many cultures to further His Kingdom *in my own heart*. Everyday I see my brokenness and need for a Savior, and yet I've come to know Jesus better and love Him more deeply because of the work He's done in my life through people from Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Wales, Syria, Greece, and people who have lived next door to me for years.

“Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.”