

**God on Film: Go High**  
**Sermon 6-11-17**  
**Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**1 Peter 2:11-12**

<sup>11</sup>Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. <sup>12</sup>Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

**Message:**

As you may have noticed, we are doing a series of “God on Film.” As many of you know, I love to watch movies. So I thought I’d have a little fun with preaching for this month. Today’s movie is “Man of Steel.” For those of who love comics and may even remember those Christopher Reeves days of Superman. This is a new iteration of Superman released in 2013. In this scene, Clark, also known as superman, found his way to this strange alien ship that he believes will give him answers to where he is from and what exactly is his purpose. Let’s watch. (Play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5z4Cpzpf4C4>) Clark is a man in a world that is not his own. He discovered this when he had supernatural strength. He discovered this when beams came out of his eyes. Or when he could blow and he could turn things to ice. Or when bullets would ricochet off his body. Having these special abilities was both a blessing and curse. It was a blessing in the sense that he could save people in dire situations. He could save people from a burning building. He could catch people in mid-air. He could prevent catastrophes from happening. The problem with being an alien in a foreign land is that it can inevitably be lonely. People may at first be enamored

with his supernatural abilities and he gets a lot of attention. But eventually they turn on him or punish him for being different by socially exiling him. He's not one of them. Intrigue and hope is replaced with hatred and oppression. Clark is faced with some difficult decisions. Does he act and be like these people in a foreign world and forsake his supernatural abilities? Or does he resolve that he is different and only can experience relationship at a distance as he saves many lives? Does he be a beacon of light? Of hope, at the expense of his own needs?

In 1 Peter, Peter seems to see believers in a similar light. That we come with supernatural abilities. We have Jesus Christ in our lives. We can provide hope to the world. We can be the light in the darkness. We can be compassionate in the absence of love. We can have mercy on those who are underserving of such a gift. We can encourage and build people up for God's Kingdom on earth. Through the power of Jesus Christ we can set the captives free from their sin. We have Jesus Christ in us. Verse 11, "<sup>11</sup>Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul." When we agreed to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we became something more than just human. We have the Spirit with us. We have Jesus Christ in us. That we may make disciples of all nations. That in the body of Christ, we are one. We are not alone. But to those who do not understand we are aliens to them. The things we do. The practices we engage in are foreign to them. They seem silly, antiquated, foolish and lack meaning. But they may not have the eyes of Christ to see the beauty of such practices and devotion to Christ.

Years ago, when I was in Haiti, I thought, "To these people living in such extreme poverty, how would we explain amusement parks to them?" Think about how absurd it would

sound to someone living in poverty and has no concept of American culture and life. We go on rides to have fun. We are seeking some sort of thrill. We are trying to feel alive in some ways. And we pay an insane amount of money to do it. Now, I love riding a roller coaster just as much as the next person, but doesn't amusement parks epitomize our privilege and wealth. Imagine dropping someone from a developing country in an amusement park. They would truly be an alien in a foreign land. So in our culture, as Christians, as aliens, how should we conduct ourselves?

“When in Rome. Do as the Romans do.” This common phrase that we use has its origins in a Church Father, St. Augustine. Augustine thought that when we are in a foreign land, we should not draw unneeded attention to ourselves. That we should do as the culture is doing. As long as it doesn't compromise our core beliefs. And there is some truth to this. If we are going to have any witness or impact as believers in Christ we need to have some common ground with the people. Jesus was a carpenter. He wasn't rich. He was one of the people. Just like Jesus came as God in the flesh. God didn't have to become human to relate to us. But God knew that He was the only answer to sin and darkness in the world through His sacrifice on the cross. Taking on human sin and conquering death. Jesus went to the temple and walked among the people. But Jesus also took some pretty strong stands. Especially in the sermon on the mount intimating that if we think sin, we have already sinned. Or that some of the actions of the Pharisees were not faithful actions towards God, but were self-serving. He was being counter-cultural in challenging the religious leaders of his day.

But then we can be so much like our culture that we don't look any different. This has been my beef with the Brethren culture for many years. We have a strong heart and desire for service. For serving those in need. For relieving people in disastrous situations. And I love that about our culture. But when we serve and when we go to relieve in these situations, the Brethren attitude is that people will see Christ's light in me by my actions alone. While there may be some truth to this, it's not the whole truth. Because I know of some very good people, who are not Christian, who will gladly volunteer at a soup kitchen, a local food bank or fix their neighbors lawn mower. To be kind, loving and nice may not be enough for others to see and know the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Okay. So let's say that we decide to be extremely different than the world. Maybe almost Amish-like. Living in a closed community where we attempt to become holy and righteous. Maybe even like monks or nuns. What impact does that have on the kingdom? How are we following the great commission? How are we making disciples? Back in high school, I went on a fast. I fasted from much of pop culture. Especially television. This was really hard for me. I was fairly addicted to movies and television. But I needed to detach in an effort to draw closer to God. And for the first few weeks it was really good for my spiritual health and well-being. But gradually, I found that it was harder and harder to relate to my friends at school. Increasingly, I couldn't connect with them. Nor could I connect with people outside my Christian circles. God called me out of that time of fasting eventually. And I think God wasn't telling me that I couldn't engage cultural things like entertainment. But that I needed to have a healthy relationship with entertainment. And that I could even use entertainment as a connection point

with people. So if we totally withdraw, we hurt our impact on an ailing world. But if we totally become enmeshed with our culture, how different are we from the rest?

Sadly, I saw this in the past presidential election. It saddened me as I watched my Facebook explode with political opinions. Especially those who I knew as believers in Christ. Those who I may have even held in high esteem. It saddened me to see them be no different than the rest of our culture. After the many social media slugfests over politics, I was saddened to see that many of my fellow believers were not being the light that they could be in such hatred and darkness. Now, I'm all for differences of opinion. But what I saw was uncalled for hatred and some really vile words at times. These disagreements usually were disrespectful in tone.

So how should we conduct ourselves in this world? Peter says in verse 12, “<sup>12</sup>Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.” When Peter mentions “Gentiles” in this passage, he is not referring to an ethnic group as Paul did in many of his letters. Peter is referring to unbelievers. Gentiles is a word used to associate with unbelievers. Also note who is the judge here. It is not you or I. It is God. It is God who receives the glory. Through our honorable words and actions, may others see the light of Christ. I don't think Peter is calling us to be totally different than our culture nor totally part of our culture. Peter is calling us to a third way. That we would live honorably with the heart of Christ. Not to get too political, but some of you may have seen Michelle Obama's speech a few months back where she called us all to “Go high when they go low.” Now, I don't know Michelle's faith background. Whether you agree with her

politics or not is irrelevant. Isn't she right about this? Part of being Christian. Part of being an alien in a foreign land. Being destined for heaven, but we are here on earth. Is deciding that we are going to go higher than our counterparts. That we are going to be better. Even if our friends and coworkers are pretty good people, our calling as Christ believers is to go higher and be better. To be more honorable as Peter calls it.

We live in a world that sorely needs a better example. That needs a Christ example. That sorely needs the light of Christ in their lives. Even if they don't know anything about the power of Jesus Christ. Theological giants from Duke University, Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas write a provocative book about this very message called, "Resident Aliens." They say this, "[The Church] seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith and vision, which is ours in Christ. The confessing church seeks to be the visible church, a place, clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God. The confessing church has no interest in withdrawing from the world, but it is not surprised when its witness evokes hostility from the world." Folks, we are increasingly living in a world where our culture is hostile towards Christianity. Or even worse, may not even care about Christianity. Our institutions are dying. The Church is dying. We no longer live in a society where the church has power in American democracy. And believe it or not, this may be a good thing. Historically, when the church has not been tied to the governing powers, is when its witness has been the greatest. When the church has not been tied to the governing powers, is

when its witness has been the greatest. And we are living in such a time where we have an incredible opportunity to be the light of Christ in the face of such opposition. We have an incredible opportunity to be more honorable and hopeful through our faith in Jesus Christ. To go higher than the rest of our culture will ever be able to go.

Willimon and Hauerwas continue, “The cross is not a sign of the church’s quiet, suffering submission to the powers-that-be, but rather the church’s revolutionary participation in the victory of Christ over those powers. The cross is not a symbol for general human suffering and oppression. Rather, the cross is a sign of what happens when one takes God’s account of reality more seriously than Caesar’s. The cross stands as God’s (and our) eternal no to the powers of death, as well as God’s eternal yes to humanity, God’s remarkable determination not to leave us to our own devices. The overriding political task of the church is to be the community of the cross.”

What’s the answer to be like the culture or to be separate from the culture? Well Superman, or Clark Kent, answered this by being both. He was both a symbol of hope and one of the people. Jesus calling us to be both the light and to understand His people. To not totally be separate. And to not totally be like the culture. *Take a moment to write an answer to the following question: “What is one thing you can do or say differently to go higher and be more honorable to shine the light of Christ among your co-workers and/or friends?” (After you answer the question, continue reading)* You can be the light of Christ. You can go higher. You can be more honorable. You can be a witness. Just do one thing differently. Start there. In a world that is growing full of violence and hatred, they need the light of Christ in you. They need God’s healing work to work through

you! Even though you are destined for heaven, be aliens on this earth. Be the alien that God has called you to be in this land and in this time. Amen.