

Walking with Jesus in a Weird World

Things To Do While Living In Rome

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. For your benefit and also for the benefit of those of you who are online, we do have these business cards to invite men to come and be part of the Bible study. We've just redone it so that on the back you can put your name and your phone number on there so there's a little contact information for the person that you are inviting to come. If you're online and you're interested in seeing one of these, send me an e-mail, patrickmorley@maninthemirror.org, and just say you'd like to get a business card in the mail. Include your address, your ground address, and we'll send one of those to you. You can copy it. E-mail me and I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll send you a digital copy of it and then you can copy it for you group if you want to. That's that.

If you would, please turn in your Bibles ... By the way, those of you who are here, if you would, pick one of those cards up now and let's ... We want to walk in the world as priests. They're many of us. Let's go ahead and take those cards out and, as part of our priestly responsibility, let's invite some other men to be part of the Bible study who might benefit from it. If you would, pick one of those up right now.

Turn, if you would, 1 Peter 2. We'll be beginning at Verse 11 today. Let's go ahead and do a shout out. There are 8 men of all ages, young, medium, and old, who have been meeting for a year in Anchorage, Alaska. They're part of the Chapel of the Cross Nazarene Church there. Chad Gerondale, I hope I put the pronunciation on the right syllable there. Chad Gerondale is the leader and they've been meeting for a year on Wednesday evenings at 7 o'clock. They start with dinner at 6 o'clock. They're now part of Man in the Mirror Bible study. I wonder if you would join me in welcoming them to the group. One, two, three ... Hoo-rah! Welcome, guys. We're glad to have you as part of this study.

We're doing a series, and the name of the series is "Walking with Jesus in a Weird World." Today, the title of the message: "Things to Do While Living in Rome." I'm on Trip Advisor. I use Trip Advisor and I'm always looking to ... When we go to a particular place, I always am interested in clicking the "things to do" tab. We're going to be talking about some things to do while living in Rome. The meaning of the idea will come a little more clear here as we go on.

Why are we here? Well, we have a lot of fun. For those of you online, you don't know this, but we show a little funny video most weeks, or an interesting video, 1 or 2 minute video, before we start the Bible study, just to lighten it up a little bit. We don't show them to you online because most of them are copyrighted and it's too much of a hassle to figure out how to do that. Get your own videos, would be the suggestion there. Or, send me an e-mail and I'll send you the links to the videos we're using. Anyway, the point is we try to have a little fun here. We're building relationships, there's lots of fellowship. A number of you are here investigating the claims of Christianity. This is serious work that we're doing here. Others of you are here trying to figure out how to grow in your faith. Again, it's serious

work. Many of you are here using this an outlet to engage people that you know and your friends so that they can either investigate or grow themselves.

Basically, it's about an inspiration, encouragement, challenging each other, and some application and how we can apply God's word. That is all going on here. I'm not your football story, golf joke-telling Bible teacher. I'm interested in doing some of that, too, but this is a calling for me. My mission here is to help men, help you, help us, help me, STOP, examine our lives, be reconciled with Christ, and then make any needed changes based on a commitment to God's larger purpose. That's been consistent for all 30 years. That statement has been consistently on my mind for 30 years.

Today seems to be a especially appropriate because what I'm trying to do, then, is find ... In a scripture, I'm trying to figure out how can we land on something that has gravity? How can we ask and answer the question what is the compelling problem that we face that is being addressed by this scripture? How can I create gravity around this text and the problem that we see in our everyday lives that's being addressed by this text? Today, why did the Holy Spirit preserve 1 Peter, and why did the Holy Spirit preserve this text we're going to look at today? What is the problem that God is trying to solve with the text that we're looking? What is the problem that God is trying to solve by keeping 1 Peter in existence? There was a letter to Laodicea that Paul wrote that got lost. God didn't see it, in His divine wisdom, important enough to preserve that, but he did preserve these verses here. Why did he do that? What is the problem that he's trying to solve?

Just a little bit about 1 Peter. I don't think I've mentioned any of this yet in this series. From the perspective of Providence, where is the origin of this book, this book is most likely written in Rome. Peter was the bishop of Rome. At the end of this book, in his personal greetings, he refers to the place of origin as Babylon, what most certainly ... No scholar thinks it was the literal Babylon, but that Rome was the figurative Babylon. The Babylonian captivity ... Babylon was a very evil and wicked place. Israel was conquered by the Babylonians. They were taken off into captivity. Babylon became a metaphor for a place that really wasn't very good. Peter is most likely referring back to Rome as the Babylon.

We know that the Roman Empire, if you looked at the Mediterranean, it's basically all the land around the Mediterranean, including Spain and France and Italy and then the North of Africa, Syria, Israel, Asia, Turkey, modern-day Turkey. All these countries were part of the Roman Empire. This letter ... We passed over this, too, when we got started, but he's writing this book to the known world right at the beginning of chapter 1. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Those are all modern-day Turkey places. He was writing to Christians who were spread out in different parts of this Roman Empire.

Well, in the Roman Empire ... This book Peter probably wrote between 60-65. Peter is typically thought to have been martyred in 65 AD. We know that Nero burned Rome. Well, maybe he did, maybe he didn't. Commonly thought that he was behind it, between July 18 and July 19 of 64 AD. There was a great persecution that was going on. Christians were being taken and tarred and used as ... Lit up, illuminating the night, and martyred. All kinds of very terrible things were going on and the Christians ... Peter was watching all of this and he writes this book, 1 Peter, and he says, "You are aliens and strangers. This world that we live in is very weird. You are aliens. You are strangers in this world." Then, we see ... He's mentioned this before. We're picking it up again, "Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world." Peter is ... This is the world in which Peter is writing. He's in Rome.

The first thing I want us to talk about is from one Rome to another. Gibbons, who wrote ... Edward Gibbon, who wrote "Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire," was quoted by Francis Schaeffer. Francis

Schaeffer wrote a book called "How Should We Then Live?" in 1976, so 49 years ago. 40 years ago? 50 years ago? 40 or 50 years ago. In this book ... The subtitle, "The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture." He writes in his author's note, "This is an analysis of key moments in history which have formed our present culture and the thinking of the people who brought those moments to pass." While it's not a comprehensive history of Western thought, he does put a lot of emphasis on what's going on in the Roman culture.

He quotes Gibbon ... He found 5 attributes that marked Rome at its end. Schaeffer found in Gibbons 5 attributes that marked Rome at its end. Number 1, a mounting love of show and luxury. A mounting love of show and luxury, or affluence. Materialism. Elsewhere in this book, and I've quoted it myself, Schaeffer identifies the 2 dominant values of our culture, personal peace and affluence. We won't go any further on that, but this would be the affluence part of it. Second, a widening gap between the very rich and the very poor. Third, an obsession with sex. Fourth, freakishness in the arts masquerading as originality and enthusiasms pretending to be creativity. A little more opaque than the others, but you get the idea. Fifth, an increased desire to live off the state. Obviously, all of this sounds very familiar with some of the things that we see going on now. The problem is here ... The problem is we've created Rome. We are recreating Rome.

The Roman Empire lasted 500 years. Some would say 507 years, but about 500 years. That doesn't mean that the United States is in any imminent danger, probably, of collapse, but we have created Rome. What's really going on here? What's really going on here? Well, too many thermometers, not enough thermostats. Too many thermometers, not enough thermostats. Too many Christians doing what everybody else does. Romans 1:23 and 25, exchanging the truth of God for a lie and the glory of God for an idol. Too many believers joining in. Of course, all of the non-believers who don't see anything wrong with what they're doing anyway.

It prompted Saint Ambrose to one time say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Actually, what he was really talking about is what day of the week you do fasting. It has come to mean ... "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," it has basically come to mean fit in. Go along. Figure out what's going on and join in. That's what's really going on. Why does it matter? Why does it matter? It matters because God loves every human being. Every human being was created by God. He's not going to let this stand. There are afflictions, there are sufferings that people are going through. In many cases, people are doing evil things. They're doing evil to other people.

This is certainly not an explanation for everything that's going on, but many of the afflictions that we see people going through, these are gracious. These are gracious afflictions because God, in His mercy and His love for the whole creation ... All the creatures have been subjected to frustration, futility, vanity, affliction, suffering. For the whole creation has been subjected to this by the one who subjected it, God. Why? So that the whole creation might be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light.

A man wakes up at 2 a.m. It could be you or someone you know. It is certainly someone you know. A man wakes up at 2 a.m. He's in the grip of despair. He doesn't know how he can go on one more day. His business ... He has a complete lack of meaning and purpose in what he's doing. He's going through the motions. He has bills to pay, he has responsibilities. He's a responsible man, but he gets absolutely no meaning ... He has no idea of why he is even doing what he's doing, much less what God's larger purpose is in that. That is result in anomy, in angst. He's been taking that out on his wife. His wife, laying next to him asleep now, she weeps herself to sleep because her husband is so stinking mean to her. She

doesn't know how she could go on one more day. The kids are acting out and experimenting with things because dad is always so angry, he has a spirit of anger, that he alienates them. They're looking for their social cues from places other than where they ought to be looking.

He's laying there at 2 a.m. He's thinking, "How did I become a Roman?" Actually, that's not what he's thinking. If he was smart, that's what he would be thinking. "How did I become syncretized and synthesized into Rome? I'm not an alien and a stranger here. I belong here." This is what he should be thinking. What does that man need? Well, he needs a priest. He needs a priest. What we talked about last week, that would be you. He needs someone is willing to walk in the world as a priest, to be an alien and a stranger.

What is the one question that we could ask this morning that really needs to be asked and answered at this moment? There are probably several ways we could look at it, but the question I want us to look at this morning that I think needs to be answered is how can a Christian ... How can you, how can I, how can we? How can a Christian live Christianly in a Romanized world? That's what I believe this text is trying to help us understand. As we get going here, before we dive into the text a little further, the Big Idea today is this: **Live such a good life that people know where to turn when Rome burns. Live such a good life that people know where to turn when their Rome burns.** I would have put "their" in there but I didn't have enough room to keep it on 2 lines.

The text, again, "Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to do two things: to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul, and, number 2) to 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." There you have it. There you have it. Let's take a look at this question. I put it in quotes because I'm using Schaeffer's book title, "How Should We Then Live?" By the way, there's a video series that goes along with this. I went through a course on it a long time ago. It's a very nice book, if you're interested in that kind of thing.

How should we then live? First thing up is what is this idea, "abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul?" Keep your finger there and turn back to Galatians 5:16, or just listen. Galatians 5:16, "Paul says, "So I say ..." This is Paul now. "So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." When Peter says abstain, what he's saying, or not saying, but what he means is that ... Live by the Spirit. Live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Invite the Holy Spirit moment by moment if you can, but certainly as often as you can. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you the power. "My grace is sufficient for you," Jesus said, "because my power is made perfect in weakness." You don't have to be a strong person. The way to do this is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gosh, there's a lot I want to tell you here. I already know I'm not going to have enough time to tell you everything, so let's go ahead and move to Verse 17. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other." We each have a human nature that's fallen and therefore tends towards sin sometimes. We have, as Christians, the Holy Spirit, as well. They are in conflict with each other inside us so that you do not do what you want. If you're led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. More on that on a different day. This is what it means to abstain from sinful desires. It means to walk in the Spirit. Walk in the spirit.

What do we mean by good? Live such good lives? Live such a good life, as in the big idea? Well, we're not talking here about works of merit. We're not talking about ... In medieval times, the Church added to the gospel of Jesus. Up until the Middle Ages, the gospel was based on the finished work of Jesus Christ

on the Cross. The Church began to add works of merit to the finished work of Jesus so that both were a part of it. When we read this, "lead good lives," we're not talking about something you do that leads to the cross. We're talking about something we do that leads from the cross. You don't do this to gain your salvation and your standing with God. That's based on the finished work of Jesus. Now that you have it, what do you do with it? How then should we live? You see?

Philip Melancthon, who was Martin Luther's lieutenant, he said that justification is based on faith alone but not on a faith that is alone. You see? It's the whole book of James. "Faith without works is dead." It's not "faith without works to become saved is dead," but faith, what you have it, without works is not much faith at all. We have all these people fitting in, doing ... When in Rome, doing what the Romans do. That's the opposite of what we're talking about here. It's the life of a priest. The life of a priest is the life of an alien. The life of a priest is the life of a stranger. There you have it.

Because of all that, how should we live? How should we live? How should you live? How should I live? The big idea. Live such a good life, such a good life, that people know where to turn when Rome is burning up on them, when they're waking up at 2 o'clock in the morning and don't know where to turn. If you see somebody that's exhausted at work or at play, their Rome is burning. People don't get that way just because they had indigestion from pizza. Well, maybe they get that, but you know what I'm talking about is this consistent sense of anomy, angst, despair, that you see. You see the people's eyes. Their Rome is ... God is burning their house down. He's allowing evil to burn their house down. They haven't been able to abstain from their sinful desires because they don't have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe they do have the Holy Spirit, if they're Christians, but they have not been walking in the Spirit. Therefore, they have not been abstaining from sinful desires. They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie. They have exchanged the glory of God for an idol. Their house is on fire. They're burning down. Nero sits in front of their house laughing and playing a fiddle while they burn down. We have the opportunity to do something about it.

The rest of 1 Peter is pretty much a list. It's a list of things that we can do, call them suggestions perhaps. I think it's more than suggestions. It's the word of God. It's a template, if you will. It's a list of the kinds of things that we can do to be good. Is it everything we can do to lead such a good life among people that they'll know where to turn when Rome is burning? No, but it's a pretty good start. We're going to just dip into this oh-so briefly here now because these are things that you can explore. You already know what they are anyway. The point of this on this list is that what we want to do is we want to become a certain kind of man. We want to become a certain kind of man. Most of you already are. All of us know that we need to be reminded.

This is the list. In verses 13 to 15, we see the whole thing of citizenship. "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted under men, whether to the king as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish ..." Sent by the king. "To punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right, for it is God's will." Wow. It is God's will that by doing what? Good. Live your lives in such a good way. By doing good, that you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men, the Romans, those who allowed themselves to be Romanized. The first thing we see is just good citizenship. Does this mean there's no place for civil disobedience? Well, that certainly is not the case. We know the two midwives that did not murder the little children in Israel were rewarded with families of their own because they disobeyed the unjust, the unlawful rule of that particular king. For those of us

who live in this country, our kings don't get away with that kind of stuff very much. Yeah. We are under the law, basically.

Then, in verse 16, let's call that "be a servant." "Live as free men but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil. Live as servants of God." 17, let's call this "respect." "Show proper respect to everyone." I saw on the news last night that approximately 50% of traffic fatalities in the United States include road rage. Interesting. They showed some pictures of trucks running cars off the road, showed a picture of a guy running over a couple on a Harley-Davidson motor ... They were parked at a traffic light, they exchanged words, the man and the woman on the Harley-Davidson, the guy turns his car and he runs over the motorcycle. The people fall off, they didn't get hurt, but ... That's not exactly showing respect for everyone. That's what aliens and strangers do. Romans don't do that. Romans are the road ragers. Hopefully it's not us. I'm sure that some of us have had a little road rage from time to time. Hopefully we've been able to rein that in. Show respect for everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers. Fear God, honor the king. Those are ways to show respect.

Then, slaves. 35 to 40% of the Roman population were slaves. Not slaves like our slaves back in the dark era of our country, but nevertheless slaves, property, without rights. Not freedmen. Some were freed. By the way, if they lived in Rome and they became freed, they became citizens of Rome. There was a much kinder relationship between slaves and masters in those days. It was all demographics, it wasn't just poor people. There were physicians who were slaves, as well, but they were property. This is addressed to some large percentage, maybe a third, who knows, of the people. It says, "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect. Not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh, harsh masters, for it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God." How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong, and then do right? If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this, you are called. You are called to this suffering because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example to follow.

That gives you the beginning of a list of some things. Now, I have a list. I've had this list for 25 years. It's on one sheet of paper. Actually, I have a document with I think 150 pages of backup to this. I've been doing it for 25 years. I've been journaling and writing down and refining my 1 page list for 25 years. There it is. I've never published it, I'm not going to publish it yet. I have made my list. I would like to, as an application, encourage you, if you don't have a list to guide you of major principles, that you consider perhaps making a list of the things that are really important to you.

I've got things here. I have ... These are the bullets, these are not the actual words, but the ... Ultimate desires. These are my ultimate desires. This is my life purpose, my calling. Organizing principle. Other purposes and principles. My plan. After that, here is my plan. He is the plan. My life message, by the way, to help men stop, examine the lives, we reconcile to Christ to make needed changes based on a commitment to God's larger purpose, which I mentioned at the beginning. Focusing ideas, the organizing philosophical metaphor. I'm a builder, right? I build things. The architect does not have to occupy the building for the building to stand. I try to build strategies to stand on their own. That's ... This is my list. My mission. My management style, working with people, spiritual gifts, business skillset, ministry skillset. Sources of pleasure, one of which is to communicate a spiritual truth with gravity. Best uses of my time, I've got 3 of those.

On my tombstone, conquered by grace. Man is a rebel. I am a rebel. I did not come willingly to the Cross, but Christ regenerated my heart. He conquered my rebel spirit by his grace. I have been

conquered by grace and I am being conquered by grace. I told my wife, unless I say otherwise, that's what I want on my tombstone. Conquered by grace. That's what God is doing. He's conquering your Rome. He's conquering all the Romans around us. That's what he wants to do. He wants to use you and he wants to use me to do that. That's why the big idea is this: live such a good life ... That's what the scripture says here. **Live such a good life that people will now where to turn when Rome burns.** Let's pray.

Our dearest father, we come to you with hearts that in many cases are very, very heavy today, for various reasons. It might be our own weight, it might be the weight of someone around us that we have empathy for. Lord, some of us are filled with joy and some of us are filled with both. Regardless of where we are, Lord, help us to be reminded of the Christian worldview, the worldview that makes us aliens and strangers in the world in which we live today. Lord, for any of us who have allowed ourselves to be either explicitly, implicitly, or tacitly following the dictum, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," if any of us are trying to fit in, have been trying to fit in, Lord, help draw us back from that precipice. If we've fallen over, Lord, give us a parachute or something. Lord, bring us back to the place where we actually view ourselves as aliens and strangers. Lord, give us the will, the power of your Holy Spirit, to abstain from sinful desire, but also to live such good lives among those Pagans, to do the big idea, to live such a good life that people will know where to turn when they have their Rome catch on fire. We ask this in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.