

Effective Exiles

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[0:00] 1 Peter 2, starting in verse 11. 1 Peter 3, starting in verse 11.

And I'm in exile. Would you ever introduce yourself that way? Would you ever make that part of your identity? Not only does Peter address this letter to elect exiles, he encourages Christians to continue thinking of ourselves as sojourners and exiles again in chapter 2.

Identity is an important thing to us, and it can be shared. It can be a group identity, or it can just be a personal identity. And it's something that we can lean into, or something that we can lean away from, try to conceal it, or cover it up.

It may make us even possibly feel some shame. So why does Peter think it's important for us to hold on to, and even emphasize, our identity as Christians, as sojourners and exiles?

So one thought is that being a sojourner or an exile can leave you feeling isolated or lonely. But God's people have experienced many long periods of exile, and so when we identify as sojourners and exiles, we share in that long-running history of being God's people that are displaced and minorities.

[2:11] We're connected and grafted into a history that goes all the way back to Abraham, who identified himself as a sojourner and a foreigner. So just for a minute, we're going to zip back into 1 Peter earlier, into chapter 1, and we'll grab a little bit of context so that we can see what Peter's trying to communicate today.

So we'll go right to the beginning, to verse 3, chapter 1, verse 3. Peter's reminding us of who we are in Christ. He tells us, So Peter reminds us that it was God's mercy that caused us to be Christians. And he also tells us what we're looking forward to. He says, An inheritance that cannot be taken away and a salvation that's waiting to be revealed. Last week, Jeremy showed us that God's mercy freely given is the catalyst that welcomed us into the family of God.

But wait, there's more. Not only have we been reminded of our past and our future, but Peter also reminds us of who we are right now. And more importantly, he reminds us what we are to be doing while we wait in exile.

So we'll look at chapter 2, verse 9 now. Peter says that, We Christians are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[4:05] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Have you ever struggled to know what God wants from you?

It's this. It's proclaiming the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness. Peter is telling us that this is a thing that God wants all Christians to do.

Peter tells us that while we wait, we are to work. But it's a very specific kind of work. We are to proclaim the gospel and share our own personal testimony.

To tell people how God has affected your life. To share how God's mercy has transformed you. And do you see that word mercy in verse 10 again?

God's mercy is the catalyst that caused you to repent and believe. It's because of God's mercy that you have been moved from spiritual death to spiritual life. Peter says that it's our job to tell that.

[5:06] To tell people about that. About God's mercy. Have you ever been in a crowd and you hear those four dreaded words that make you freeze and try to shrink down so no one can see you?

You know those words. I need a volunteer. I might be alone. But it feels like all of a sudden there's only two people in that room.

Me and you. Too much eye contact. That's how Peter opens up verse 11. He's speaking directly to you as an exile.

He says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

When we hear Peter say, Beloved, we should feel that what he's about to say is directed right at you. Right at the reader or the hearer, minus the panic. You only have to feel panic if it's like a clown or something.

[6 : 22] You know it's probably not going to go well. In all seriousness, this is where Peter pivots and he begins to give us specific and tangible instructions about how we're to live a holy life that actually demonstrates the gospel to our unbelieving neighbors while we live in exile.

Beloved, like a wise and loving shepherd, Peter is leading us into some do's and do not's here. But he does it with the tenderness of someone who has learned some important lessons the hard way and is one who is deeply and personally understands what it's like to receive mercy.

Peter will later call sin a croucher, ready to devour. But here he's drawing our attention to the fact that we have these sinful passions or desires inside of us.

And if we give in to them, it can tear us apart from the inside. Not only are we exiles in an external sense, but we are exiles in an internal sense as well.

We are new creations in Christ, but we still deal with a remainder of sin as earthbound humans while we wait for Jesus' return. Peter not only tells us we are sojourners and exiles, but he tells us that we are to live like sojourners and exiles.

[7 : 42] So what does it mean to live like an exile? So we'll look at the two words. Sojourner. So I looked these up in a lexicon that helps us understand the context a little better that Peter was trying to use.

It's a little more specific than just a generic dictionary definition. So a sojourner pertains to a resident foreigner or one who lives in a place that's not one's home.

There is an implied emphasis on having an inferior sociopolitical status. And definition two for exile, it is pertaining to staying for a while in a foreign place or residing temporarily.

So I like slides. So I've got one more slide. So we're going to work towards kind of combining these two terms into one composite idea.

That's what I think Peter is driving us to. And so it's a person. It's a resident foreigner. That means that you live in a place, but you don't embrace all of the practices or traditions of that place.

[8 : 56] You're not the majority. You're a minority group. And importantly, and I don't know that we think about this as much when we think about exiles and sojourners today, but residing temporarily.

It's not a place that you're planning on staying. You're planning on returning to your home country. And that's like Paul says in Philippians. He says, But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So our citizenship is not where we live. That's part of being a sojourner in an exile. So it's someone that can function and live within a specific culture, but not belong to it or intend to belong to it.

It's someone who's going to stand out in a crowd. And I think the idea of an ambassador gets us close to what Peter's describing here. So one fun part of my job as a carpenter is getting to know some of my customers a little better, and I'm going to borrow a story from one of my customers.

His name was Richard. And here is what he told me one day. He said some of the work that he did was with ambassadors, and he worked in different embassies around the world. And in this particular case, he was in a Finnish embassy in Dubai.

[10 : 14] And so one well-known aspect of Finnish culture is sauna. And Richard was discussing the sauna culture with the Finnish ambassador in a desert, very hot desert.

And the ambassador told Richard that when the Finnish army is deployed, they have mobile sauna trucks that they bring with their unit that moves with them. These guys, they're committed.

They're committed to the bed. So Richard was even invited in. The ambassador invited him to join him in the sauna inside of the embassy, again in a desert.

So what's my point? It's not saunas, as fun as that is. The ambassador lives, works, and interacts with the citizens and the government of Dubai. He brings his own culture and represents the country from which he belongs.

He is, in a sense, a small outpost for Finland inside of Dubai. His work is to improve relations between his home country and the country he works inside.

[11 : 23] He works to promote trade deals and economic activity between the two countries. An ambassador doesn't give up their citizenship, their culture, or the values of their home country because they don't intend to stay.

They'll plan to return home someday. They would be ineffective at their job if they didn't interact at all with those outside of the embassy. And equally, they'd be ineffective if they traded their culture, values, and citizenship in favor of the place that they're working in.

So that kind of gives us a picture of an ambassador. In verse 12, Peter commands us to keep our conduct among the Gentiles honorable.

Our witness of godly living might be used by the Holy Spirit to bring others around us to faith in God. That's what Peter is getting at when he says, They may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

As Christians, Peter is showing us that we are to be an outpost for Christ. As sojourners and exiles, we are to live like an ambassador by sharing the message of the gospel and showing people how the mercy of God has influenced your actions and decision making.

[12 : 43] We live and engage with the people around us that God has put into our lives, but we don't abandon God's call to live a holy life. Like an ambassador, we would be an ineffective witness for Jesus if we don't interact at all with our friends and neighbors that haven't put their faith in him.

But we would be equally ineffective if we abandoned living a godly life. Godly living and honorable behavior is essential if we are going to be effective exiles.

It's the beginning of our credibility to share the gospel with unbelievers. Peter continues to explain how he expects us to act as an ambassador, and he introduces an idea that may cause us to bristle a little bit.

You guys ready for verse 13? I kind of like the CSB translation for this verse, but the ESV says, Do you feel a little gut reaction to being told to submit?

And I think that's a perfectly normal reaction. And I think that Peter actually expects that kind of response. And more importantly, your unbelieving friends and neighbors also feel this reaction.

[14 : 10] So what does it mean to be subject to or to submit? Submission means that we should have an inclination to obey under normal circumstances.

I'm not going to supply you with a list of those circumstances that fall outside of normal. I think that's to miss the forest for the trees here. I think it's sufficient to say that a decision to not submit should be approached with earnest prayerfulness and should be a rare exception.

Okay? How are you guys doing? Still with me? Let's talk about our guts more. Okay? It's important to remember that a gut reaction isn't always our best reaction.

If we can get past our initial instinct to push Peter away and reject the message, we'll notice that what he's trying to share is more nuanced. He's showing us an opportunity for us to do the work of an ambassador.

Yes, being in exile can help us feel connected to the family of God, but it can also give us an opportunity to show our unbelieving friends that when their hope wavers while the leadership of our country swings back and forth between the two main parties like a pendulum, or they want to take away this or mandate that, or when eggs have become ridiculously expensive and you feel like rising up against the chicken industry, I suppose.

[15 : 43] Big chicken. Even then, our hope as believers is steadfast and unshaken. Don't rise up against the chicken, people.

They don't need that. Our unbelieving friends and neighbors are watching us to see how we respond. They're evaluating Christianity as a worldview, and they're weighing it against their own worldview.

Like it or not, brothers and sisters, they're looking at you. Excuse me. To those around you, you are an ambassador. You are a small outpost that represents Jesus to a world that may not know him. How you live the gospel is how you share the gospel. Peter reminds us that even though it appears that kings and emperors are the highest authority, God is still higher.

Remember in Esther, even though King Ahasuerus sat on the throne in Susa and appeared to be the highest authority in the narrative, God was still sovereign overall.

[16 : 48] God may not have made his presence known, but that doesn't mean he wasn't still seated on his throne. When our neighbors are watching us for our reaction to the latest news headline, we only need to remember one simple truth that will keep us from reacting to our

unreliable gut.

It's by God's good providence that human institutions are granted. Sorry, I got a tickle in my throat. I might be dying. All right.

It's by God's good providence that human institutions are granted. It doesn't mean that kings, emperors, prime ministers, and presidents are godly or even good examples for their citizens. Our own experience tells us that. At best, it's a mixed bag. If, as believers, God is our highest authority, and he is, then let's try and understand the difference between a Christian and a secular worldview.

Their highest authorities are world leaders. And so let's look to scripture and see what we can learn. Do you remember in 1 Samuel 8? You guys have that memorized? The people of Israel asked Samuel if they could set up a human institution.

[18:04] They wanted a king. They wanted to adopt the practices of their neighbors. And Samuel didn't think it was a good idea, but he prayed to the Lord. And God told Samuel to go ahead and give them what they want.

He said, just make sure they know what they're signing up for. And so let's look at 1 Samuel 8. And you guys try to keep track of who benefits under the arrangement.

Starting in 10. So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you.

He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands, commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.

He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards, and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain of your vineyards, and give it to his officers and his servants.

[19:14] He will take your male servants and female servants, and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

Do you see what's going on here?

It's taking. Seven times of taking. Samuel reads the fine print for the Israelites, and they still want a king.

They still sign. What does God do? God is completely unfazed and unbothered. When Samuel reports back to God with how things went down, God's response was to give them what they want. God says in verse 22, He says, Obey their voice and make them a king. What do we learn from this? Human institutions take, and yet followers of Jesus are commanded to submit.

[20:17] When we follow that command to submit, we are actually fulfilling the will of God. Let's look at the next few verses back in 1 Peter. Starting in 15, Peter says, For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor.

It's God's will that we would show unbelievers by our testimony, our words, and our actions. We can show them that even though it appears that presidents or prime ministers exist mostly to take, we can submit to them because God is higher still.

We are actually submitting to a good God whose plans are larger than our minds can fathom. Paul says in Romans 11, he says, Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

We can rest in God's wisdom even when we can't understand why earthly rulers continue to take. Our doing good isn't to silence foolish people.

[21:37] It's to silence their ignorance. It's making them aware of something that they weren't previously aware of. It's by submitting and doing good that we have a space or an arena to show the difference between believers and unbelievers.

It's a space for us to do God's will, to do the work of an ambassador. Like Peter says, to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you from darkness into light, to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

And ironically, the way that we show that difference, the way that we silence people's ignorance is by first submitting to it. And then, as Peter puts it, like doing good within that system.

Peter says that we're free and we should live like it. But real freedom doesn't mean that we do whatever we want, but rather we are free to do what God wills. It's a freedom that comes as a byproduct of the mercy that we've received.

It's a change in our bondage as a result of being ransomed, like Jeremy taught us last week. Peter says, not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb, without blemish or spot.

[22 : 59] It's because of Christ that we are no longer slaves to sin.

But like Peter says, we are free to live as servants of God. John Calvin calls it a free servitude or a serving freedom. Brothers and sisters in Christ, honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the emperor.

These four imperatives can be lived out in harmony with one another. They're not at odds. We fear God and acknowledge that he is worthy of all of our praise, our worship, and our service.

We honor everyone because we recognize that all people are made in the image of God. We love our brothers and sisters in Christ because we are all adopted into the family of God on the basis of his mercy extended to us.

And we can show honor to our leaders because we know that they have been placed in their position by divine authority. God's sovereignty isn't threatened by any human authority, and so we shouldn't be threatened either.

[24 : 16] Showing honor to our earthly leaders is showing honor to the God that put them there. human institutions take, but God gives, like when he gave his son.

Peter is calling us to follow after Jesus' example of giving out of an abundance inside a worldly culture that is set up mostly to take or extract value.

Because we are united to Christ in faith, we are also called to be united to Christ in his mission to abundantly give. We are called to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Brothers and sisters, live as sojourners and exiles. View yourselves as ambassadors for Christ. Small little outposts that share and live out the giving nature of Jesus through your own personal testimony.

Peter knows that this is what we are called to while we wait for Christ's second coming. How you live the gospel is how you share the gospel. Our testimony has the power through the Holy Spirit to bring others to faith in Jesus, but it isn't about pointing to ourselves.

[25 : 32] I don't point to myself and say, look how good I'm doing. It's actually telling others that I'm not special, that the same mercy that changed my life, the free gift that was made possible only by Jesus taking my sin upon himself and dying in my place and his blood paying my ransom.

That same mercy is available to all who repent and believe. Like Paul reminds us from the prophet Joel in Romans 10, he says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This also isn't about covering up our failures in our past. We don't need to pretend like we have it all together. We don't need to act like our lives were going just fine, but then we sprinkle a little Jesus on top of the things we already had going and we're leveled up and better because of it.

That mindset actually weakens our testimony. It weakens it because even though you probably weren't proud of who you were before, before the mercy of God changed your life, you should recognize that it wasn't an error or a mistake on God's part.

Just like when he granted and provided a king for Israel all those years ago. If you can believe that God has a purpose in this mixed bag of world leaders that we have right now and you should, then beloved, there is also purpose in your past.

[26 : 59] God can redeem all things. God has given you your past experiences and if you will give them back to God as a humble offering, who knows how he'll use them for his glory.

Doing good can look like a lot of things, but primarily it should look like Jesus. His life and his teachings are an example for us to follow. It looks like freely giving out of abundance even in a world that takes.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5. He says, if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. You can show the world that its systems are broken by giving.

When it asks something ridiculous of you, you give more. It can look like caring for those in need instead of waiting or relying on some agency or some other human institution to do it for you. Jesus gives us the opposite of this in Matthew 25. He says, truly I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

[28 : 08] Jesus tells us that willing service to others is also willing service to him. And Jesus shows us through his actions that everything the Father gave him, he willingly offered it back, holding back nothing, not even his life.

And we know it's willing. This is the same freedom that Peter tells us that we have, that Calvin called free servitude. And we know Jesus was willing because he says it. He tells us in John 10, he says, for this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. What do you have that hasn't been given to you? The old hymn says, all the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him. The only thing that we need to point to about ourselves is our own failures and need. That's our connection point with our friends and neighbors that don't yet know Jesus. It's in that way that we fit into the world.

[29 : 17] Every other thing that we can point to is a work of the Spirit in us. The result of the Father's mercy, the atoning sacrifice of the Son. All that we bring to the foot of the cross is our own sin.

And even that we offer back to God. That's the gospel and that's what our testimony has the power to show others. How you live the gospel is how you share the gospel.

You, beloved, are an ambassador. Would you guys join me in prayer? Lord, we confess that apart from you we can do nothing.

We come to you, Lord, not knowing how you will redeem our past, our failures, and our shortcomings. But we know that you are able. Lord, use us in the places that you have us. open our eyes for opportunities to be ambassadors of your mercy, to share the gospel, and to show those around us that you, Lord, are the difference maker.

[30 : 29] Lord, we are exiles and sojourners, but we long for the day that we won't be. Like David wrote in the wilderness, he said, O God, you are my God.

Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you. As in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Lord, we long to be with you.

Lord, as we transition to this time of communion, just please help us, help show us the areas in our lives that we haven't yet given over to you. Amen. Lord, we remember that Jesus freely gave everything that he had.

He gave it back to you, even himself as a sacrifice. It's in your precious name that we pray. Amen.