

LIVING IN EXILE

Sermons from 1 Peter
(2020-2022)

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We Are Exiles (Thematic Intro to 1 Peter)

Psalm 44:11, 13-16 (NLT-SE), *“You have butchered us like sheep and scattered us among the nations... You let our neighbors mock us. We are an object of scorn and derision to those around us. You have made us the butt of their jokes; they shake their heads at us in scorn. We can't escape the constant humiliation; shame is written across our faces. All we hear are the taunts of our mockers. All we see are our vengeful enemies.”*

Psalm 120:5–7 (NLT-SE), *“How I suffer in far-off Meshech. It pains me to live in distant Kedar. I am tired of living among people who hate peace. I search for peace; but when I speak of peace, they want war!”*

Psalm 137:1–6 (NLT-SE), *“Beside the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept as we thought of Jerusalem. We put away our harps, hanging them on the branches of poplar trees. For our captors demanded a song from us. Our tormentors insisted on a joyful hymn: ‘Sing us one of those songs of Jerusalem!’ But how can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a pagan land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget how to play the harp. May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I fail to remember you, if I don't make Jerusalem my greatest joy.”*

God had promised to give Israel their land as an inheritance forever. He had promised that their king would rule and that they would own the gate of their enemies. But Judah had rebelled and now they were exiled from home to live as foreigners in Babylon. They were viewed as weak losers. They didn't have what others had. They were weird. They worshipped one God and abided by a different moral code. They hoped in goofy promises about a descendant of theirs ruling the whole world. They were ridiculed. And they longed to know, "How long? When will we be at home? When will we be on top?"

But furthermore, they dealt with a very challenging dilemma that you see in Psalm 137:6 — how can I live as an Israelite in Babylon but not forget that Jerusalem is my home? How can I survive in exile without losing my identity, who I am? Some of you can relate to some of this challenge - over 30 members here are first-generation immigrants.

It seems the Christians Peter wrote to in his letter could relate to this challenge as well. He refers to them as “exiles of the Dispersion.” It is possible that a large number of these Christians had lived in Rome, but, for a variety of possible reasons, they were forced to leave and live as foreigners in other places.

And something really special happens in this letter — though many of them were possibly literal exiles, the idea of all Christians being exiles, sojourners, foreigners emerges as a central background to this letter. Yes, many of us may or may not live in our hometown or a place we call home, but we aren't at home, not really.

Though — thank God — we aren't in the specific situation many Christians are in in other situations-completely marginalized for our faith — we can relate to the laments in those Psalms, can't we? (And if we can't, maybe we have snuggled up too close to the world) We live in a world where Christ is not at the center. He is not the reason for everything, he is not the means of everything existing, he is not the end for which all things were created. The messages in Scripture that speak to exiles and foreigners are really applicable for groups of Christians at any time when they are the minority. And these Scriptures help us pray, think, and live properly in a culture that doesn't have Christ at its center.

And so Peter writes at different points encouraging Christians to think about themselves and their whole lives as one of an exile, a foreigner. 1:17, *“Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...”* 2:11, *“I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”*

We are foreigners. We are living in exile. We are sojourners here. We have been living in a society where the differences between Christians and the world have seemed subtle for a long time. And many differences are still subtle and insidious, which presents great dangers for us. But many differences are becoming more obvious, pressure is being put on us — what will we do?

I fear the subtle differences more, but the more obvious ones like sexuality may help us see just how head to toe foreign we are in this world. For a long time we have accepted that we are morally different; the rich young ruler had that down pat too. But are we willing to give up our place in this world when that is challenged? Or are we too in love with where we stand socially, politically, economically with society?

This is a theme we are going to explore from time to time in 1 Peter the rest of this year. But for now let's conclude with two paradigms given to the exiles in Babylon that we should adopt throughout the time of our exile.

1. Build Houses and Live in Them (Jer. 29:4-7; 1 Cor. 5:9-10)

Jeremiah 29:4–7 (ESV), *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”* False prophets were telling them their exile in Babylon was going to be short, so don't get comfortable. But you notice Jeremiah's admonition is the opposite -you are going to be here 70 years, so build homes, plant gardens, get married, have babies, and actually pray

for this city and seek its welfare. No, this is not your permanent home, but I have you there for a reason (next lesson), so build yourself a home and do good for this city.

Paul also speaks quite clearly to this in **1 Corinthians 5:9-10 (ESV)**, *“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.”* He was trying to tell them to stop associating with the sexually immoral in the church, but it seems they misunderstood. I'm not talking about those in the world — you would have to completely leave the world to do that. The insinuation is: it is not God's will for you to leave the world.

We are going to talk about things from time to time that, if we hear them wrong, we may start feeling guilty for living in the world. We may think, is it okay to build homes? get married? get a job? hope Houston and the U.S. flourish? The answer is yes! I have foolishly felt guilty at many points in life for living in the world and wished I would just die so I could be at home. But the admonition of these two texts could actually be combined to say, “Don't let the world get into the church, but stop trying to get the church out of the world! I have you there for a reason. Build a home and get ready because I want you to pray and work for the welfare of the place you are in.”

2. Depart, Touch No Unclean Thing (Isa. 52:11; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)

When Isaiah was looking forward to the time when Yahweh would return to redeem Jerusalem and the time when Israel would leave captivity to come rebuild the temple and Jerusalem, this is what he said. Isaiah 52:11 (ESV), *“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.”* The idea is that there is work to do in God's city, so you need to leave and get to work — and don't bring any bit of the defiling nature of Babylon with you.

Paul takes up the Isaiah Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 (ESV), *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”* God is living and walking among you. You are the temple of the living God. So get out and touch no unclean thing. What partnership does the temple of God have with idols? Light with dark? Christ with Satan, Belial.

As we build homes and live and work in Babylon, as we pray for and seek the welfare of Babylon, we need to understand the spirit at work in the world around us: Belial, Satan. We are foreigners living in Babylon-cities and cultures that were built with the aim of ignoring God's ways, defying God's kingship, and of exalting itself above God. We are priests of the Lord bearing the holy vessels for his temple, we are his temple- and uncleanness is everywhere out there. We must be careful that we don't take part in her sins, that we don't get so at home in Babylon that we can't see the difference between it and Jerusalem. We must take care that we don't love life in Babylon, in Sodom, so much that we can't bear to leave to do work in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

1. We are foreigners, exiles, sojourners. Accept it. wear it proudly. We don't belong in this culture.

2. Stop trying to leave. Get planted. We are going to be here for awhile. God has us suffering in exile for a reason.

3. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers. We are not immovable rocks. We are temples that can be defiled. We live in Babylon and seek the welfare of Babylon, we pray for her, but we don't get in bed with her. Her way of doing politics, business, relationships, sexuality, justice, ethics, entertainment — it is seriously flawed and unclean. Let us bring the healing and cleansing temple waters to her, and not let her instead rule and defile us.

Rejoicing through Trials in Exile (1 Peter 1:1-12)

As Daniel prophesied, the Jews who returned to their land and rebuilt and awaited the coming restoration suffered terribly. Though they lived on their own land, they were in all actuality still slaves, still exiles. A mostly reliable intertestamental book - 2 Maccabees - records what life was like for the Jews when the foreign ruler Antiochus persecuted the Jews. 2 Maccabees 7 is a particularly vivid account. Antiochus was trying to force a mother and her 7 Sons to eat pork and they refused. So Antiochus killed them all one-by-one before their mother's eyes. Their limbs were cut off. They were skinned alive. Cooked alive in pans. It was horrific — yet neither the mother or the sons gave in. They bravely encouraged one another to remain faithful to God's laws.

They are not alone in their faithful witness through the trials of exile. Abraham left his homeland and offered the son of promise as a sacrifice. Daniel continued praying to Yahweh when threatened with the lion's den. Daniel's friends refused to bow before the king's image when the fiery furnace was put before them. Christians in third-world countries live in hunger and poverty but refuse to stop praising Jesus. Mothers and fathers give God glory though they lose their children - unborn or otherwise. Workers refuse promotions and accept demotions when they could gain if they would just fudge a little. And the list goes on.

What has driven believers to praise and rejoice in God and to stand firmly in his laws through their various trials? We all suffer trials and difficulties — social, economic, medical, psychological, relational, and religious- how can we keep rejoicing?

Peter writes to Christians who in many senses are like us: they are foreigners and minorities in the world by reason of their faith and whether it is due to their faith or the fallen nature of our world, they were grieved by various trials. But they needed encouragement in their grief to keep rejoicing. So Peter reminds them of the inheritance they wait for, the testing nature of trials, and of their privilege to know the good news - three encouragements for faithfulness and joy in trials. Notice 1 Peter 1:1-5.

1. Rejoice in Our Sure Inheritance (1:1-5)

Ashley and I have been taking more evening walks lately and checking out the homes still being built in our neighborhood. We have lightly chatted about whether it would be nice to have a touch more space in a couple years if we have more kids. But Ashley said it would only take a few more years for us to think we would need even more space — we always want bigger barns. And part of that is human nature. In reality, aren't we all always looking for a heritage, an inheritance, treasure that is better than what we currently have? We keep thinking this or that will fill that need, that hole and we will be in our safe, imperishable, undefiled inheritance.

Karen Jobs points out in her commentary that if many of the people Peter was writing to were actual exiles dislocated from Rome, their inheritance or any heritage that had been passed down through the generations had a dubious value at best. There was no hope for them to have any sort of earthly treasure or place that felt permanent in the slightest.

Peter himself may have been writing this letter from Rome himself - a world away from where his home was. Do you hear the joy and thanksgiving behind Peter's words? Undeterred by the fact that they are all exiles by God's foreknowledge, he praises God because he has caused us to be born again to a living hope. Some of us were born into wealthy families, some of us were not. But we walk away from the pleasures of Egypt to be reborn to a new Father who is rich and powerful beyond measure. Peter says that by rights of our new birth we are (verse 4) privy to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept safe in heaven for us.

Some think this inheritance is speaking of the glory of heaven itself; others like myself see this as talking about the heavenly city and all the glory that will come with it out of heaven in the end. Regardless, I want you to see how Peter says our inheritance is permanent and indestructible. Furthermore, note verse 5: God's salvation and rescue that will be revealed from heaven is ready now.

We all have this desire for treasure that will last. There is nothing wrong with that desire if we will focus it in the right direction. God is saying, "Be content with what you have" in some places (Hebrews 13:5) but in other places he is saying "Don't you dare try to turn off that craving for one second - wait for me to fill that desire." Instead of continually failing to shut off that desire for an imperishable inheritance and then feeling guilty when we splurge, can we instead say this: I will be content with what I have now because I know that if I wait a little longer through this exile I will have an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled. Brothers and sisters: it is sure. By your faith, you are protected until that day.

If we will stop pulling out our phones to scroll, tap, buy every time we feel bored or discontented in our exile, but instead pause to ask, "Am I trying to fill a heavenly hole with decaying stuff?" We could build our hope in powerful ways (*cf.* Matt. 6:19-21). Now, notice a second encouragement to see our various trials as a test in verses 6-9.

2. Rejoice While Trials Test You (1:6-9)

You may have wondered before, "Does the Bible talk about the trial I am going through?" Yes. Notice verse 6: you have been grieved by various trials. This life is filled with all sorts of various trials - and if there is a hardship we are grieved by right now that you feel God probably scoffs at, never mentions: we are wrong. Throughout this book Peter is going to talk about how to live properly in exile when you are ostracized for your faith, when you have a bad master or boss, when you live under an emperor, when your husband isn't treating you as he should, when you are falsely accused, when you are the subject of Satan's attack. And you notice what he says: we rejoice, but these various trials grieve us. They are hard. Very hard.

But Peter says these trials can be necessary so that our faith can be tested like gold is tested in fire. The aim is this: our faith will be proven to be genuine so that when Jesus is revealed from heaven our faith will result in praise, glory, and honor - probably for Jesus and for us. The problem is that when we endure various trials, they don't feel necessary for our faith in the moment. So, why are they necessary to test the genuine Ss of our faith so that when Jesus is revealed praise, glory, and honor will result?

Think about our relationships for a moment. We want to know that we are really loved. We usually feel certain about our parents' love because they have seen us at our worst and they kept pressing into us. But with others it can be tough to trust how genuine and reliable they are. Are they going to stick around? Do they really care about me, or have things just not gotten tough enough for the truth to be seen. Do you know what it is like when that friend, family, spouse is proven to really care for you? How meaningful and important that is?

God has proven his love for us by giving his child when we were his enemies, but now God needs to test our faith. He's seeing if we really love and trust him. We even wonder at times ourselves if we are genuine. There's just a lot of fools gold out there - but the fire reveals all.

And that is vital so our faith actually results in praise, glory and honor. Peter notes in verse 8 the amazing beauty of genuine trust and love — we love and trust this Jesus whom we have never seen. And as with Job, Satan calls our bluff. “No, it is only because you hedge them in so much. Take it away and they'll curse you — because you're not that great, God.” But the Accuser can say none of that when people who have never seen his face or beauty are proven to love and trust him when they have few of his benefits. The fire doesn't just prove something about us — it results in praise, glory, and honor because it also proves something about Jesus, about God. He is worthy. It's not that God needs reassurance about his greatness — it is all creation -seen and unseen- that needs the reminder. Trials are a testing that prove our faith which proclaims Jesus' glory now and on the day he is revealed from heaven.

3. Foster Joy through the Prophetic Word (1:8-12)

Peter's aim in this conclusion is to remind his readers of the great privilege they have to be able to read the prophets with both understanding and experience in what they spoke of. He wants to foster inexpressible joy by pointing them to what the prophets said about Christ's sufferings, the subsequent glories and our salvation.

People of faith have felt like exiles for a long time, but when the prophets spoke of a day when God's people would be delivered through a king, the prophets searched and inquired carefully. And I feel I have always read this wrong. Peter's not saying they had no clue what they were talking about. Though they certainly couldn't have a more perfect understanding until Christ, they spoke and then inquired — “When? What circumstances?” In fact, even angels long to look into and see.

Sit on that for a moment. The prophetic word now announced to us in the gospel is so massive and weighty that people quit their jobs and lived the lives of outcasts so they could preach the coming of good news. Angels stop what they are doing to try to peer into what God is up to. Everybody who is any body of faith — whether human or divine being — has searched and asked to see what we now see.

As Jesus said to his disciples. *“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”* (Luke 10:23–24 ESV) This is what Peter is telling us as we suffer various trials.

We have a great privilege to see the sufferings of Jesus and some of the subsequent glories because now we see in Jesus how God enters into our suffering, our exile and how he plans to reverse it all. Peter — like the evangelists — is trying to help us see that we live at the apex of all history that all generations have longed to begin to see.

Would we say that in our grief over various trials that we have a joy that can hardly be expressed or contained (vs. 8)? Let me urge us: if when we read the prophets and the gospels in your quiet time this feels like boring plain Jane stuff, please understand that we are simply not seeing it or getting it. Look again. So often we turn to the Bible to solve today's problems, this month's questions . And we need to do that. But we also need to read asking bigger questions about all time— Why are we here? Who is God, really? What is he up to? Why do the unrighteous always seem to win? Why is the world so broken? What is God going to do about that? We need to read with the understanding that somehow this stuff kept exiles praying through the furnace of affliction in every generation. And we will find God opens our eyes to the hope he has called us, to how rich God is to have us as his inheritance, and to the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward me who believe (Eph. 1:18-19).

Conclusion

Do you want joy that is inexpressible while we suffer and await the outcome of our faith? our salvation? Remember, this trial is to prove your faith is genuine. Remember to not hope in perishable treasures to fill our longing. Look to the prophets to see imaginative pictures of our hope and to the gospels as they portray that hopes start to play out.

When God brought the Israelite exiles home and began to restore the fortunes of Jerusalem, it was a picture of our salvation, now and in the age to come. When we suffer, we are tempted to numb it, not cry, not feel it. Distract ourselves. But let's conclude by listening to the message those freshly rescued exiles have for us.

“When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Psa. 126:1–6 ESV)

Hope and Holiness in Exile (1 Peter 1:13-16)

The Israelites had been tired, exhausted slaves for generation after generation. Each day they rose early to make bricks in the heat all day, sometimes being whipped. Each day they came home late, their bodies full of aching, slowly eating their dinners. They had cried so much. They had lost so many. So many sons. They were tired, discouraged and hopeless.

But not today. Today, there was a different energy in their cities when they got to the dinner table. Their homes had been cleansed of all leaven. A spotless lamb had been killed. Its blood had been put on the doorposts because the Angel of Death was coming that night. The lamb had been roasted over the fire. And when they gathered for dinner every single Israelite had their staffs in hand, sandals on their feet and belts fastened with their robes tucked in so they could move quickly. Most nights they slowly ate their food with tears, but not tonight. They shoveled that lamb and unleavened bread in their mouths with haste. They were tired, but there was a fire, a focus and a fear in their eyes. And when they finished dinner, all the leftover lamb was shoveled into the fire and burned. All previous goals, plans, passions were forgotten. They looked like they were ready to run. Why?

1. Set Your Hope Fully on Grace at Jesus Revelation (1:13-16)

Israel all in this way because tomorrow was the day their slavery would end. All other plans, purposes, goals, hopes for promotions or success or comfort in Egypt were forgotten. Tonight, the power of their God would be revealed over their masters and tomorrow they would be free.

Peter calls us to a similar kind of mindset in 1 Peter 1:13. Therefore: *because* of verses 3-12, *because* you have been promised an imperishable inheritance, guaranteed a death-conquering hope, assured your trials will cause your faith to result in glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus, and *because* you now see the beginnings of a grace anticipated by prophets and angels - *because* we stand at a weighty moment in history anticipating the salvation to come when the king of everything is revealed —

(1) Prepare your minds for action. Gird up the loins of your mind. Tuck up your mental robes and get ready to run. (2) Be sober-minded. Not mentally intoxicated. Not speaking to a "joyless gloom" (Clowney) but a clear-headed focus. (3) Set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We are slaves in exile and the grace to be brought to us at Jesus' revelation is just around the corner. But if we don't live with that intense, ever-present clearheadedness and hope on our heart, we will become lazy, fearful, distracted, hopeless. Like running a race if we

don't keep the finish line in our mind's eye, we will wonder "what in the world am I doing out here?" Then we start walking. Maybe we will stop at the next bar, grab a drink, and soothe our aches with liquid.

But we have to stop that foolish thinking and remember what is coming. We are in exile under foreign powers but we serve the king of everywhere and everything and any minute he will be revealed from heaven with grace to be brought to his loyal subjects.

When I am running and I wonder "why I am out here?" I try to think about how good it feels the rest of the day after I run, I think of how it will be over soon enough and my headphones will say, "Goal Completed."

We have to do that during this exile. Babylon promises so much, but all they are doing is rearranging chairs on the Titanic. We are working on a temple that will be filled with glory. We are eating our last meal in haste before judgment comes on Egypt. We are ready move into the city that comes from heaven. Long gone should be three days when we hope in the progress of Babylon for our security or when with live without hope, getting drunk on whatever substance, media or activity we can get our hands on to numb the pain. There are mountains and valleys, blessings and curses between now and then-despise whatever distracts you. Any affliction is light and momentary in comparison to the weight of eternal glory coming. Set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus.

2. You Shall Be Holy, for I Am Holy (1:14-16)

When Israel was preparing to leave Egypt they were commanded to purge their homes of all leaven. Leaven often represents the spreading, defiling influence of sin — it's even in the air. But God was drawing near and they must be clean and holy as he is holy. Later, when God drew near Israel in the tabernacle he commanded them to live lives distinct from the nations, putting away sexual immorality. Why? Leviticus 18: you shall be holy as I am holy.

Peter calls us to a similar life in verses 14-16. Whether we grew up being taught about Good or not, it is so important to draw a distinction between what parts of us should be former life and what should be us currently. Peter says we ought not be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance. I like how he says that because here's the reality: each of us used to be ignorant (some of us still are), so the cravings for power, sex, money, popularity, honor, knowledge and success controlled us. We were ignorant, so we didn't realize these passions would never pay off, would control and destroy us. They became our hope, our comfort, what we meditated on and longed for. I love how **Titus 3:3** puts it. "*We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.*" (Titus 3:3 ESV) That not only sounds like a miserable life-it's just straight up ugly. That

was the life of our former ignorance and Peter says, "Do not be conformed to those passions." He gives us a new mark to aim for. Be holy in all your conduct. Do we have that picture in our minds? Every part of our lives should be holy. Distinct. Clean.

Why? Why did Israel so carefully purge their homes of leaves? Because that very night God was drawing near to judge their enemies and rescue them. And the God who called them is clean, holy. And we all must urgently seek to cleanse our lives because the God who draws near to rescue us out of exile is the same holy God. *"You shall be holy for I am holy."*

God's holiness motivates our holiness. Consider his holiness — he is perfect, pure, powerful. He radiates life, love and beauty. We see that in the wonder of what he does. The beautiful creation. The wisdom in his carefully crafted plan to rescue his corrupted world. The unending patience and love. His willingness to wear our sin and shame on the cross. He has a holiness that is not simply a rigid moral purity, but the power of a lion and innocent purity of a lamb that totally transcends our ignorant, selfish obsession with worldly passions.

And this is what I have seen for the first time this week: this is one reason why he created us. This holy God does not see fit to simply self-exist in his beautiful holiness. Part of his holy character is this: he is willing to go to every length to teach and share this holiness with us. How great is our God!

We cannot become the holiness of God while we are slaves to our lusts and passions. Let us not be conformed to our former ignorance. They do not give us what we are looking for. Let us set our eyes on the pure holy power, love, and innocence of God and do whatever we need to do to confess and put that old life away.

But we will not become this by our own will power. That is one reason why we set all our hope on the grace — not wrath (Jobes) — to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. He will finally transform us into the image of his Son that we have been striving for all along. *"When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."* (1 John 3:2-3 ESV)

Conclusion

Have we been defiled by the pleasures of Egypt in our sojourning? Have we become distracted by the passions, pursuits and parties of Babylon? Salvation is nearer to us than it first was. We must adopt the Passover mindset. Tonight the angel of death comes for Egypt. Tonight the Medes make a breach in the city wall. Tonight the enemy is judged and they are all doing business, buying and selling, getting married, and drinking booze like tomorrow will come. But we know better.

1. Clean out the old leaven, the passions of our former ignorance, because the God who calls us is holy.

2. Be sober-minded. Think with clearheadedness. Don't get lost in the party and success. Think about the big picture of history.

3. Focus on the finish line. Set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. May we pray, "Maranatha, Lord come quickly" with the early saints. Let us be hopeful and holy in our exile among the nations.

Fearful Conduct in Exile (1 Peter 1:17-21)

Joseph had been exiled from the land of promise to Egypt. He was sold by his brothers and had become the slave of Potiphar. He was unjustly mistreated. He was all alone. He heard nothing from his father. He received no more dreams from God. From our perspective, it seems he had been completely abandoned. That kind of aloneness can really eat away at a person. The desire we all have to know and be known can grow and become ferocious. Having a secret pal to lie with in his exile could have been a great comfort.

But when Potiphar's wife invited him, he refused her. Not only would this be a complete betrayal of his master's trust, he said, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Day after day he refused her. One day when he went in the house to do his work and no one else was there she grabbed his garment. "Lie with me," she said. But he ran.

That kind of integrity and fearful respect for God and for others doesn't happen accidentally. It takes a lot of heart work to foster. But brothers and sisters, it is that kind of fear that will save our lives and spare us tremendous pain. How can we live with that kind of sobermindedness, loyalty, and fear in our exiles?

As Peter writes to Christians who are also exiles dispersed and enduring a difficult trial, he instructs them, "*Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.*" He gives them three reasons, motivations why they should live with this kind of fear.

1. We Call on a Father Who Judges Us Impartially (1:17)

Being able to call on God as "Father" is such a tremendous privilege. Fathers stand ready to jump into action to help their children at a moment's notice. Fathers realize that everything falls on them - to plan, provide, and protect. For children, being able to call on our fathers relieves so much fear and anxiety. Just knowing they are there when we need them is a comfort. You realize that even more when you lose a father or grandfather. When my grandfather died I suddenly felt more weight on my shoulders. I just lost someone that I could call on. In one sense, I felt like I was just given some of the burden he was carrying.

It is a privilege to call on our God as Father. The fact that he would be willing to respond to that title as we use it of him is astonishing. After the past year we have had with our two kids, I am scared to have more children. Being willing to be called father means you take responsibility for them. It means submitting yourself to the rollercoaster that is their lives. God could say, "I will be their King, their Lord," but he goes further and says, "I will be their Father."

May we conduct ourselves with fear out of respect for the one we call on as Father. I don't know how that kind of respect for a father is developed. Some children look on their fathers in this way. Some children totally disrespect their fathers. Why disrespect the one who gave you life? Why disrespect the one who would give anything in the whole world for you? Fear him. Respect him. Call on him. Lean into him. Feel his love and protection. Listen to him.

But let us recognize this: the Father we call on judges us impartially during our exile. Bad theology has crept into the church in recent years as different forms of Calvinism have made a resurgence. Some oversimplify the Bible and say we won't be judged by our life but instead by Christ's righteous life that has been imputed to us. This is the key tenant of Calvinism. We who believe in Jesus need to know that we are declared innocent and forgiven by faith in Jesus. But we who are exiles need to understand that God judges each one's actions impartially to determine if we really do believe in, trust in, give allegiance to Jesus. One person said it well, "Our knowledge of Him as Father must not dispel our dread of him as our Judge." (Beare, 1970: 100) Another person said it like this to help us see God really is our impartial judge, "The pagan life that God abhors will be no less abhorred it is is lived by one who professes to be a Christian." (Jobes)

How can we develop fear like Joseph's? See God as our precious Father who we call on and respect him for that. See God as our Father who judges us impartially.

2. We Have Been Ransomed with Christ's Precious Blood (1:18-19)

The more I see my daughters do the wrong thing, the more clearly I see myself in them, and the more I see the truth of this statement. We really did inherit futile ways from our forefathers. When we gathered for my grandmother's funeral and we listened to stories about my grandparents and her parents, sometimes I thought, "Wow, it's cool how their legacy has been passed on," and sometimes I thought, "Eek, here we are a hundred years later doing the same things our parents, grand parents, and great grandparents did."

Peter says here that God is redeeming us from those ways. Here I am trying to be the best father I can possibly be, but God is saying, "Please let me adopt your children ASAP so I can rescue them from the mess you are making." So often we can be proud of the heritage and way of life that has been passed down to us. And, we can be thankful for that. Timothy should have been thankful for the faith of his mother and grandmother that lived in him. But we also need to have humility to recognize we have inherited the futile ways of our forefathers as well. All the way back to Adam and Eve, our parents have been teaching us the same empty-headed behaviors. And it feels there isn't anything we can do about it. It seems we are all doomed to repeat our parents' failures and pass them on forever.

But God has done something spectacular to stop the cycle. He has ransomed us from our slavery at the cost of the precious blood of Jesus. How can we develop this fear? Have a respect for the blood that was spilt to set us free from those old ways. If we respect Jesus at all, we should have a fear inside us that we would profane his sacrifice. In case we are tempted to ever say, "Sin is just not that big of a deal," God is sending an opposite message here: sin is so worthless, so debasing, so destructive, so vandalizing of our lives and of the world that it required the blood of Jesus to set us free. This is what God tried desperately to teach the people of Israel about in Leviticus through the sacrificial offerings. Blood wasn't just brought before God's throne on the Day of Atonement. Everything had to be cleansed. The people. The altar. The tent. The articles in the tent. Why? Their sin didn't just separate them from God. It vandalized everything. It trashed the world. It trashed God's sanctuary. But now we have

been redeemed from those futile, vandalizing ways through the blood of Jesus. May we conduct ourselves with fear because of that.

3. "Your Faith and Hope Are the Result of God's Eternal Plan to Raise and Glorify Christ" (1:20-21)

(Credit to Karen Jobes in her 1 Peter commentary for articulating this point as cited above) Let me put what Peter is saying here in the form of a rhetorical question. Live with fear, or do you not realize that your faith and hope in God are the result of a massive, orchestrated plan to raise and glorify Jesus? He says here twice that what was planned and what happened with Jesus was to cause us to believe in and hope in God (vs. 20, "for the sake of you," vs. 21, "so that your faith and hope are in God.").

Here is the lens. We are all stuck in futile ways resulting in dishonor and death. We are all hopeless losers. But God foreknew before the world Jesus. Jesus who would take on all that hopelessness, dishonor, and death. God planned in advance to raise him from the that dishonor and death and instead glorify him. Why? So we would see how God gave life and glory to that dead dishonored man and put faith and hope in God that he might give life and glory to we who are dead and dishonored as well.

Peter wants us to conduct ourselves with reverent fear in our exiles because of our awe and respect for the careful plan of God to bring us to trust him. Our trust and hope in God were not easily or haphazardly accomplished.

Conclusion

Think about how that same fear was in Joseph. He was powerless and all alone, but his hope was in God, not in the comfort that is found between the sheets. Potiphar say that Yahweh was with Joseph. How did Potiphar know about Yahweh? Why would he think Yahweh was with Joseph? Because Joseph talked about him. Why? Why would Joseph talk about this God? The God of a father who did nothing to rescue him? The God who promised he would be exalted above his family, but now he was the slave of an Egyptian? Because: he believed in the plan God foreknew and delivered to him by dreams even though God seemed silent. And so he feared because of that. He didn't want to ruin what God had planned. And when God did bless him in Potiphar's house, Joseph gave glory to Yahweh before his master and continued living fearfully in exile. His hope was in God and he was not about to throw that away no matter how much of his family he lost or how debased he became before the world.

And that fear saved Joseph's life.

We have the privilege of calling God our Father. We are judged impartially by him. We have been set free from our futile ways by the precious blood of Jesus. Our faith and hope in God are the result of God's carefully orchestrated plan. Let us fear because of that. It will save us when the tempter comes to entreat us with other comforts while we wait.

Love and the Gospel (1 Peter 1:22-2:3)

In a story for the Atlantic called “The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake” David Brooks argues that the detachment of the nuclear family from extended family has been a mistake. Throughout history, extended families lived near one another — working family farms and businesses together. Grandparents were useful and cared for, moms and dads worked alongside aunts and uncles, cousins grew up learning and working together, and the many children had many hands to catch them when they fell. There was abundant economic and emotional support.

But as society became more industrialized and jobs moved to the cities, extended families started splintering. Throughout the 20th century people started valuing independence and dream-chasing over sticking with the family. People freed themselves from the family’s expectations. But, Brooks says, “We’ve made life freer for individuals and more unstable for families. We’ve made life better for adults but worse for children.”

There were once many hands to provide, cook, clean, care for and support kids. Now mom and dad are alone as they live life and carry the load that the extended family used to carry with them. Divorce has skyrocketed and children are being dislocated further from their family stories and from a sense of belonging to anything. Children are often not raised with a sense of being committed to anything larger than themselves - which is a very lonely way to live. Instead of becoming economic contributors to the family, children are raised with the expectation that they will run away and chase their dreams. They are free to endure the anxiety and pressure of “dreaming big” and “finding themselves” in a world without borders. We are free from the family to chase the wind.

And so Brooks wisely insists that detached nuclear families are freer from responsibility, but are also without embodied economic and emotional support.

But, not being a man of God, his ultimate solution rang hollow. He rightly saw that people should broaden their definition of kin and form closer-knit communities with people around us. But there was no substantive base underlying the new communities he suggested, except the common desire to be in community. The sense is: “just get in community and be there for each other so you are supported.”

Peter is addressing Christians as exiles in the world. And as you can imagine, Brooks’ piece touches on a serious challenge for people who are marginalized by society and exiled from home. Scripture clearly illustrates the solution: not only should we care for our biological family, the Christian community is also our family. And while Brooks is unable to help beyond “get in community and redefine kinship,” Peter tells us **how** we should redefine kinship, **why** we should love one another and **how** we can grow in our

love for one another. As we read **1 Peter 1:22-25** together, notice how the word “seed” is not talking about plants but the Father’s seed that generates rebirth.

1. Love Earnestly Because of Your Common Seed (1:22-25)

There are many purpose statements throughout the Bible explaining why God has done what he’s done. Verse 22: we were purified by obedience to the truth *for* a sincere brotherly, familial love. But we all have been born from seed from so many different fathers. We are so different. Why would we look at and love one another as brothers and sisters? Notice verse 23. We have been given a common rebirth through the Father’s imperishable seed. This makes us kin and makes sincere brotherly love possible.

And here’s what is so neat — Peter says that this seed is the living and abiding word of God. That’s a wild way to describe God’s word. Unlike human fathers’ seed that perishes, God’s word is seed that abides and is so powerful it inseminates and gives new birth to people throughout all generations.

In order to enrich our vision what Peter means by speaking of God’s word like this, he quotes Isaiah 40:6-9. In Isaiah 40 and later, Isaiah speaks to a future generation of exiles who feel forgotten by the Lord. But Isaiah comforts them with a word, good news from God. “I reign as king. I will end your warfare, hardships and oppression. I will forgive your iniquities. I will redeem you from exile and bring you home. And then Isaiah says, “Flesh is grass (people are unreliable)... but the word of the Lord (my promise, this good news) remains forever (it will outlive you, you can rely on it).

Notice the end of verse 25. Peter says this same word, good news that was preached to those exiles has been preached to us. God reigns as king in Jesus. You too are under the thumb of Babylon, but God will deliver you. He will deliver you from your sins and from the grave. And Isaiah and Peter are both reminding us: this word of God — good news — is not going to fade away like the plans of men. It endures. God reigns and will deliver.

When received, this good news is so powerful to us, that it is like seed from the Father that causes us to be born again to imperishable life to the Father. Red, brown, yellow, black, white, male, female, rich, poor — this new birth makes us family and it means we ought to love one another sincerely with a deep, brotherly, familial love.

When we struggle with sincere familial love like this for one another, why is that? Let me put my finger on two possible reasons. First, we don’t love like this when we allow another word, another explanation of reality to reorganize our thoughts and lives. How we forget the power of various ideologies, political persuasions, and secular ethics. Do we feel different, estranged from the people in this church? Consider: maybe we aren’t letting the same good news give us new birth. Maybe we have given our ears and eyes to other promises and hopes than the Christian hope; to other ideologies and politics than

the framework of God's kingdom; to other ethics and priorities than the Christ's. We must take care that we are not divided by different ideologies, politics and ethics. In fact, we must take extra care that we are not united under them too. Our world is being turned upside down right now and there are many people dressed in sheep's clothing vying to reshape our worldview. If we will listen very closely, we will hear a dragon's voice behind the sheep's clothing.

Second, maybe we don't love sincerely and deeply like this because we just forget we are indeed kin. Our superficial differences get in the way. Maybe we see ourselves as the family of those who share the same superficial differences. While we seek to rescue the lost, we must remember that those who do not receive God's seed are not God's children and are not our family. They persist in the futile ways inherited by our forefathers. Not us. We may look different - but we are family.

I love the example Jesus sets in **Mark 3:31-35**. (ESV) *"And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."*

We live in such an era of independence. We are pioneers forging our own paths to seize our dreams that fulfill us. We can get so lost trying to create our own personal legacy. But our obedience to the truth has made us kin and joins us with God's legacy. This "chosen family" here is our legacy. Your children are my legacy, and mine are yours. Let us love one another *sincerely, earnestly*. Now, in 2:1-3 Peter tells us to put away unloving actions.

2. Put Away Unloving Actions, Long for Spiritual Milk Instead (2:1-3)

Since we were purified and born again by the Father's seed, let's put away unloving actions. We are family and exiles together. Let's not have malice — evil behavior toward one another. Let's not deceive one another — lying to and tricking our family. Let's put away hypocrisy — be genuine and not two-faced. Let's put away envy — why not look at one another's situations and stuff and rejoice in how God has blessed our family? And let's put away slander — why busy ourselves by spreading junk about each other? It is amazing how this all works in theory — until we have an actual wedge between one another. That suddenly becomes an excuse to treat one another differently.

We are exiles and we cannot survive apart from one another. These behaviors are poison that will destroy our new birth. But just as our Father gives us seed to produce new birth, he gives milk to nourish us. Verse 2: long for the pure spiritual milk. This is most likely another description of God's word. To be clear, he's not saying you should desire the milk

of the word versus the meat of the word — that’s what is happening in Hebrews. Peter is enriching our vision of God’s word: see it as milk.

Consider how powerful this makes God and his word. Peter has described God’s word as both seed and milk. And by implication this makes God a Father who gives us his seed and a mother who nourishes us with milk.

If we aren’t careful we may miss something subtle here. We may be tempted to pit the word of God and love against one another. Some get agitated, “They are all about love but they don’t know the truth.” Others are arrogant, “We may not know much of the truth, but we love each other.” Do we see what Peter is saying here? What purifies us for brotherly love? Verse 22: obedience to *the truth*. What makes us family and motivates us to love one another? Verse 23: *the word of God*. What urges us to put away unloving actions and to grow in our salvation? Chapter 2: God and his nourishing milk, his word. We are to live in a flow and balance: hear the truth and live the truth; meditate on the word, live out the word.

There is a danger of hearing the word and not being a doer of it. There is also the danger of being like every generation of Israel before the exile: creating a new standard of right and wrong apart from the word and doing what is right in our own eyes.

So what should we do? Long for the milk like newborn infants. Cindy was just saying the other night that in this wild time when people are saying so many things, it is such a comfort to return to the word and know what is true, real, right. I treasure my memories of my parents and grandparents in their old age humbling feeding on God’s word. When my grandpa died in 2014 I went into his office and noticed his Bible on his desk. The Bible was only a few years old, but it was used up with notes everywhere. And lest you think my grandpa was always lost in his office secluded from the world, he was not. He was as involved as anyone in loving the brothers and sisters.

But why should we long for it in this way? *That by it we may grow up into salvation*. When we think about salvation we normally think salvation from hell. Peter is thinking, “No, salvation is something you grow up into.” Salvation is not just what we are saved from, it’s what we are saved to. We are being saved from our childish, selfish ways to be grown ups who perfectly love God and his family. We are saved, but not really, not yet.

This milk is how we continue “tasting” the Lord. Jesus is said to be the word of God because if you have what someone says - their words - then you can truly know and experience them. If we have tasted that the Lord is good, we should return to the milk. When David was exiled from Israel by Saul he almost lost his life when he sought refuge among the Philistines. But he cried out to the Lord and the Lord rescued him from his troubles. In Psalm 34 David then urges: *taste and see that the Lord is good!*

Conclusion

In the many afflictions of exile it is easy to lose our way and seek out different sustenance. When we stop returning to God's nourishing milk we stop growing up. We start dying. And we also lose the seed that makes us kin with the Father's children.

Apart from the word of God, we are stuck with Brooks' solution. He concludes, "Everybody should have membership in a forged family with people completely unlike themselves." What a lonely, God-forsaken way to move through life - clawing for chosen family with people who have hope only in this life and in the comfort of community now.

We are exiles. But we can have a hope, community and good news that endures eternally. Let us long for the word of God like milk so we can be one with the children of God.

Identity and Purpose in Exile (1 Peter 2:4-10)

I'll never forget the feeling I had when Jose Altuve hit his third homerun in the first game of playoffs in 2017. I was with Taylor at the game. And when the Astros won the world series, I cried. I felt like I was apart of something so much bigger than me. We crave to be part of something that matters, something that is bigger than us. We take pride in the country we are from and the city we live in. We fly a flag and we wear the colors of our favorite teams. And when the thing that is bigger than us is successful — when the Astros win it all — we feel like we are apart of something that matters.

But this craving to be apart of something can be hijacked by Satan. He wants to find “innocent” ways of injecting our lives with “meaning” and “purpose.” He wants to hijack why we are here, what we represent and the image we bear. Satan can use the Astros and the Texans, our school and our company, the United States, political parties and activist groups, and so much more to hijack why we are here.

But Peter has spoken to us about how we are part of a family created by God's imperishable seed. After speaking to us about how we ought to have a brotherly love for one another, Peter drills into us a clear picture of who we are together and what our purpose is together. We will see two pictures of who believers are and one picture of the end unbelievers are destined for.

Stones and Priests in a Spiritual House for Offering Sacrifices (vs. 4-6)

Peter uses Old Testament Scripture throughout today's text to make his points. Here, he quotes Isaiah 28. In Isaiah 28 God indicts Jerusalem and her leaders because they think they can reject God's word and still cheat death. So God promises that a storm is going to pass through and their deal with death will be annulled. But, as Peter quotes, Isaiah says that this doesn't mean Zion is completely doomed. God is laying as a foundation a tested stone - and that stone isn't going anywhere. Those who are full of unrighteousness and lies will be swept away. But those who believe in and cling to this foundation, this stone — the storm will not sweep them away. Cling to the foundation stone of Zion and you'll be just fine.

But how in the world is someone to do that? The implication of Peter and Paul as they quote Isaiah 28 is this: the foundation stone, the cornerstone of Zion is the God-man Jesus. Everyone is building their cities and “temples” to honor their great name and the names of their gods. They will all fall. Even the Jerusalem below will fall. But God is building Zion for his honor and Jesus is its foundation. Cling to him, believe in him and it doesn't matter what storms come against the cities of this world, they cannot touch us.

So Peter grabs onto this image of God building his city Zion and this spiritual house. You have come to this living stone and you yourselves are like living stones being built into my spiritual house. Not only that, you are a holy priesthood in this spiritual house here to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

I love the stones image because Peter is addressing Christians who are scattered all over the place living as a minority culture in a world that is hostile to them. I can imagine that from

ground level, they seem to be a silly, disorganized band of radicals who will never collectively amount to anything at all. And don't we feel like that at times? Massive forces play tug-of-war for this world and sometimes I feel like we are just a forgotten, scattered mess of nobodies eating crackers, drinking grape juice, worshipping an executed criminal. But actually, from heaven's view, we are all stones being built together as one great spiritual house on Jesus the foundation, the cornerstone. And just as he was rejected, we will be. And just as he is chosen and precious in God's sight, we are too. And God promises that no matter what, the spiritual house he is building, the Zion that he is constructing: it's going nowhere. In Revelation 21, we see that project finalized: the completed new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven.

I love this image of us being priests because of the purpose and meaning it infuses into everyday life. Through Jesus we have also been qualified to be priests who offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. The priests of the Old Law lived all around the tabernacle and they were charged with bringing holy offerings from the people to the throne of the Lord. But they could bring wrath on themselves and the congregation at any moment, so they had to be very cautious. We are now the priests who constantly live before the throne of the Almighty God. What sacrifices are we bringing? When we worship God with both our mind and our heart, it is a sacrifice acceptable to God. It matters. When we serve and love one another for God's honor, it is a sacrifice acceptable to God. When we forgive sins, when we kill sin, when we repent of sin, when we stand up for real justice in an unjust world, when we do our jobs as for the Lord, when we instruct our friends and children in the Lord and bring them to him — it matters. We are bringing sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So God has bestowed us with great honor. We are stones in a spiritual house that will not fall. We are priests bringing sacrifices that will be accepted by God. But not everyone receives this honor. In verses 7-8 Peter is going to weave together the messages of Old Testament Scriptures to show those who reject Christ are doomed to fall.

Unbelievers Reject God's Cornerstone Stone and Stumble (vs. 7-8)

The picture of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone comes from Psalm 118. In Psalm 118 David says that the nations surrounded him on every side, but the Lord helped him cut them down. His enemies had made a foolish mistake. Builders who don't build on the cornerstone are going to build a house that will crumble. Similarly, nations that reject God's true king will fall because of it.

The "stone of stumbling" image comes from Isaiah 8. In Isaiah 8, everyone is terrified of the conspiracies surrounding the shifting powers in their world. They are running around frightened — but nobody is trembling before Yahweh. They are ignoring him. So God says, I'm a rock that's a sanctuary. Run to me and you'll find shelter. But, he says, I'm also a rock of stumbling. Those who don't fear and dread him as they should will stumble over me and be broken.

Zoom out and see the big picture here. David is the king the nations could have submitted to, but they were all cut off because they fought against him. God is the great king of the whole earth that Israel should have dreaded and sought refuge in, but they feared everything else,

ran, stumbled on him and were broken into pieces. Peter is now merging these images and applying them to King Jesus. People who disobey God's word do not believe in and give allegiance to King Jesus — for that they stumble and are destroyed.

Why do this? Why can't Peter just stop judging everyone and just focus on who we are? The Spirit of God in Peter knows that when we see the destiny of unbelievers, it helps us have compassion on those who fall. Furthermore, it helps us see who we are more clearly. It builds our group identity. And that's important because there is always the danger that the new Israel will become like the old Israel and stumble over King Jesus.

In our pluralistic society it's pretty easy to adopt the wrong understanding about people who say "no" to the gospel. Sometimes we can think they are innocent people on neutral ground. "Hey, my faith isn't their thing. No big deal." And to be clear — we aren't to be rude or arrogant. But let's also hear Peter clearly. Those who encounter Jesus can never stand on neutral ground. Those who do not believe in Jesus are rejecting the true king of all and they are rejecting the foundation stone of Zion — the only city in which there is any security. To reject Jesus is to sin and to ultimately be destined to stumble and fall and be broken.

The world is a mess because it has not been built on Jesus the cornerstone. This is what happens when we reject God's stone for God's city. Are we a mess too? Let me insert Paul's plea to the Corinthians here. What are we doing yoked together with people who have rejected the very foundation stone of God's house? Yes, we should witness about Jesus to them. But if they keep rejecting Jesus, they will fall. If we are arm-in-arm with them, they will bring us crashing down with them. We have been granted such an honor — let's not throw it away with the world! Peter has one more identity-building image for us in verses 9-10.

Chosen Race, Priesthood, Nation to Proclaim His Excellencies (vs. 9-10)

This text is awesome. Israel was God's special possession to stand as priests between him and the world. They were nothing from a worldly perspective — idolaters and slaves — but God brought them out of darkness and made them something. And here Peter weaves together at least three Old Testament Scriptures (Exodus 19, Isaiah 43, Hosea 2) that talk about God's special purposes for Israel and he applies them all to us.

Here's why that is so significant. First, this means we receive the promises that were granted to Israel. You know all those prophecies that speak of how God is going to forgive Israel's sins, restore their land and make them powerfully reign over their enemies? Those promises from Daniel about how the people of God will rule over the beastly nations? Those promises about how God would grant Israel mercy and make them his priests, his representatives once again? By having the faith of a true Israelite, we have become heirs of all those promises. This is one reason why the gospel turned the world upside down — Gentiles rejoiced along with some Jews, but some Jews were straight up angry.

Do we see how insanely merciful God has been to graft us into his plan? Who are we that we would inherit the king and the hope of ancient Israel? Who are we that we would be granted the honor of becoming the true Israel of God?

Second, this is so significant, because as Peter talks about here, this means we now get to adopt the purpose of Israel. Once, we were called, “Not my people,” but now we are called “my people.” And we have been given a charge: proclaim the praises, the excellencies of the one who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

We can so often forget why we are here and who we represent. Satan is trying to hijack our meaning and who we represent. We scratch and claw for some sort of significance in something greater than us. And in our craving to be apart of a community, a project, a team, club, country, political party, school, company that means something — if we are not careful we will give our whole hearted allegiance to “big things” that do not perfectly reflect Christ’s values and do not exist to magnify Christ’s name. We become the Astros and Texans guy, the Republican or Democrat guy, the activist guy, the Longhorns-Aggies-Razorbacks-etc. guy, the United States guy, the guy or gal that’s going to change the world with our new invention or medicine. And though we would never admit it, maybe we look at ourselves and our world a little too much through these lenses. Oh, I see nothing wrong with flying the flag, wearing a sports shirt, voting for Trump or Biden, hash-tagging BLM, or doing good things that have an impact — but only if we refuse to give any of our hope or identity to these things.

We are ambassadors, priests representing the name of our God and it is in our partnership with him that we make a real impact on the world. Our labor in the Lord “*is not in vain.*” We are bridges to help the world see how marvelous God is. That’s why we’re here.

Why can this be tough? It’s tough to proclaim God’s excellencies when we don’t see how excellent God is. If we are going to proclaim God’s excellencies, we have to see them! This is why I love the word of God. Every text gives us a fresh view of how great our God is. (This is why I love have the best job in the world — you pay me to tell you and others how great God is.) As we meditate on God’s word consistently, what happens is we carry these VR goggles with us everywhere and we start seeing the greatness and majesty of God behind everything.

Conclusion

If we struggle to embody this identity — stones in God’s house, priests to sacrifice to his name, a nation devoted to proclaiming God’s praises — it’s time to become more acquainted with our magnificent, holy God. It is time to fall in love with him — for the first time or all over again. In the words of Paul, it is time to see how worthless everything else is in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. It is time to see how beautiful everything becomes when Jesus is our life. We don’t have to be nobodies. We don’t have to search high and low, scratching and clawing to become someone of significance in this world. In Christ, we are a people. And with us, God is building an everlasting house and city on the foundation of Jesus, and it will never fall. Let us surrender our identities and purposes to our great God.

Glorifying God As Exiles (1 Peter 2:11-12)

As Moses explained God's instructions to Israel in Deuteronomy, he motivated them to obey by telling them what God was planning to accomplish through their obedience. *"Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?"* (Deuteronomy 4:6-8 ESV)

God wanted the nations to be impressed by him and his people: how close he was to his people and how wise he had made his people through his righteous rules. For a few years during Solomon's reign this was accomplished. The Queen of Sheba travelled a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. When she arrived, she was impressed both by his wisdom and by the happiness of the people who got to listen to Solomon.

But this wasn't the case throughout Israel's history. Later, Ezekiel called out Judah for being so wicked that they caused Sodom to appear righteous. God scattered his people among the nations. When the people saw their evil behavior and how God had to punish his people, Ezekiel said these exiles profaned, dishonored God's name wherever they went. But Ezekiel promised that one day God would vindicate the holiness of his name: he would put his Spirit in his people and cause them to be obedient.

Now Peter speaks to God's Spirit-filled children as exiles, sojourners, visitors in the land. Peter is going to stress over the next couple chapters that the world is hostile toward us. He wants to make sure our behavior brings God glory and even result in the salvation of the "Gentiles" around us. (By the way, isn't that so cool that we have adopted the identity of Israel so deeply that we would refer to the world as Gentiles?) Verses 11-12 introduce this section and we will spend our time there today. Notice **verse 11**.

Abstain from the Passions of the Flesh (vs. 11)

There's a contrast here. Two verses before, Peter called us a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Think about that picture. When you think about a royal priesthood and a holy nation, do you get a picture in your mind of a class of people who also wage war against passions of the flesh? Phrases like "passions of the flesh" are used elsewhere to refer to any uncurbed human impulse (Karen Jobes). I want to naturally think that priests are so holy that they can't even relate to battling fleshly passions, impulses. But that's not the case. Every priest here deals with this.

Notice the language used. Peter says these passions of the flesh wage war against our souls. The flesh wants. These human impulses attack us and scream at us to grab sex, take drugs, drink alcohol, vent anger, spread gossip, hoard money, binge everything and seize forbidden pleasures.

These passions do not occasionally throw rocks at us — they wage war. They are looking every single day to find a foothold in our heart, mind and life. Sometimes the attack is overt. Sometimes it is unexpected. Sometimes it is subtle. And our flesh wants us to obey these impulses. The flesh wants more, new, better, pleasurable. Day after day, it wages war. That can make sojourners like us very, very tired.

And yet Peter gives us a stern warning: we must remember who we are and we must abstain. We are sojourners, exiles, visitors. If we were to obey our fleshly passions, we would be like others and we might feel more at home in this age.

These sinful passions also provide a fleeting sense of pleasure and comfort. We all have pain. Some of us have more. And these impulses offer us momentary relief of our pain, bitterness, hopelessness. But being a sojourner in a foreign land means we purpose to abstain from the fleshly passions everyone else participates in. It does not mean we are perfect. Paul explains in Romans 7 that there are battles we lose. But we must suit up and wage war.

I like this image of waging war. Wars have momentum. Take encouragement from that. The more fights and battles you win, the more strength and momentum you gain in the war. Paul says elsewhere that our righteous life is actually a breastplate that protects us from the attacks of Satan. Righteousness helps us be more righteous. Winning battles helps us gain momentum to win the war. But, a warning: a victory isn't cause to rejoice as if the war is over and declare, "I'd never fail" or "I'd never deny you, Lord" as Peter once declared.

The same is also true on the other side. Losing battles can cause us to lose momentum in the war. This is actually a big motivation for me to abstain: I don't want to lose momentum in the war and make it harder for me to finish the fight. When you are losing battle after battle, the enemy accelerates and it only feels like a matter of time before we surrender.

Remember the good news of Ezekiel. The people were dead and the war was over. They had hard hearts against God's will. But God promised a surgery to revive them: a new heart and a new Spirit. If we truly desire in our heart to love God's law and to overcome these fleshly impulses, Jesus promises our Father will grant his Holy Spirit to any who ask. Beg God every day for his Spirit to come into your body and restrain it. Beg God that his Spirit might make you a temple of his presence in our exile. Notice why this is so crucial in **verse 12**.

Live Honorably So Gentiles Will Glorify God (vs. 12)

Roman writer Suetonius referred to Christianity as a mischievous superstition. Roman historian Tacitus said Christianity was a dangerous superstition and that Christians are detested for their evil practices. Peter says here that the Gentiles will speak against us as evildoers. Peter's warning is similar to Jesus' in **Matthew 5:11 ESV**, "*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*" Jesus says this is what they did to the prophets. They redefine good and evil and falsely say that those who are righteous are evil. Hasn't that been evident in what people have said surrounding Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation? She fears God and values the lives of the unborn, so the Gentiles are painting her as evil.

They are going to accuse us of being evildoers. Take it from someone who knows: that can get in our heads. What if they are right? That's why Peter says: keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. We should have humility to confess and apologize and make it right when we are truly in the wrong. But we also need to ensure that their accusations don't have any teeth. There is a lie that has crept in among Christians who declare to the world "I am the same as you, the only difference is I am forgiven." Now there is a truth here: outside of Christ we are all condemned because we have all sinned. But the nature of our conduct after Christ is supposed to be increasingly different. And people watch strangers more closely to see what they will do. They will jump on anything.

But notice that Peter says the Gentiles can "see your good deeds." Gentiles are raging against God and painting us as evil, but in the long run, the Gentiles can see what is truly good. Situations that seem fuzzy in the moment are made clear when written as history. In the long run, people are able to appreciate those with self-control, those who do not obey fleshly passions and impulses. And that actually gives us the opportunity to teach the gospel. Yes, many disdain the truth and any form of self-denial. But many also feel out of control — unable to control their own actions and bodies, unable to stop destroying their lives. Our witness of good deeds, of being able to take pleasure in the good of this world, of abstaining from destructive fleshly passions — it is quite important. Through our conduct we are making an appeal that God has shown us the way to truly live.

Because of this, we shouldn't apologize for how we live or how God calls them to live. I get the temptation: in our world, the chiefest "virtue" is tolerance. No matter how much a person is destroying their own life, we are supposedly virtuous if we support them.

But one day the Son of Man is going to come around. There will be a day of visitation. They will see the true king and his judgment will come. And every heart will melt. And if they are ever going to come find salvation and be able to glorify God on that day, we have to stop being so cautious and apologetic about the truth and about honorable conduct now. Brothers and sisters: *all sin hurts people and one day everyone is going to see that*. And if we are trying to be PC we may look great now and they may love us now, but can you imagine how they will look at us when they learn the truth on the day of judgment? When they realize that we knew the whole time?

Giving into the passions of the flesh always hurts people. But we have been called to show the world by our conduct that God has a better way. We are to show them how great our God is. May we abstain from evil and do good so that the cries of glory to God will drown out the noise of their accusations now. As Jesus said in **Matthew 5:16 ESV**, "*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*"

Conclusion

Are we causing people to honor and glorify God? This is our purpose. Let me offer one more encouragement as we wage war against passions

Eve was tempted by the fruit in part because she saw it was *“good for food”* and it was a *“delight to the eyes.”* It looked and tasted good. But just a chapter before, Genesis tells us that she was already in a garden that was full of trees, *“pleasant to the sight and good for food.”* She forgot.

Sometimes the passions of the flesh are so hard to abstain from because we don't realize God has already surrounded us with the opportunity to have better fruit. When Ezekiel declared that God would give his people new hearts, he also declared that he would restore them to their land and make their land like the garden of Eden. Though Revelation shows us how we still await the fullness of that promise, I like to think we have a firstfruits taste of that today through the fruit of the Spirit.

We all have pain in this world. But which fruit tastes better? Sexual immorality, impurity and sensuality? Or love, joy and peace? Jealousy and fits of anger, or patience, kindness and goodness? Greed, drunkenness and orgies, or faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? We have been promised a Garden of Eden in the age to come and through the Spirit we are already being offered the firstfruits of that garden now. Let us bring people to glorify God by giving them a taste of that fruit.

After the momentary pleasure, fleshly passions only offer disappointment, anger and self-hatred. But God's honorable ways of good works offer joy and glory. Let us demonstrate this better way for God's glory and their salvation as we proclaim the good news of our king.

Subject to Caesar (1 Peter 2:13-17)

For thousands of years people have lived under the mediocre and often oppressive reigns of the kings of earth. But the prophets have promised for a long time that a trustworthy king will come to truly do justice. And he has finally come — Jesus Christ. When the first Christians gave their worship and allegiance to Jesus and his kingdom, the world quickly realized that the reign of King Jesus rivaled the reign of Caesar. Jesus was building an unstoppable Kingdom, inheriting the nations and instructing all kings to bow before him, but that's what Caesar was trying to do too. And as Christians began hoping in the justice that King Jesus would bring, they started seeing the insufficiencies and evils of Caesar and his cohorts — as we do today.

What should they do about that? How should Christians relate to the powers over us in this age while we hope in the government of Jesus? Let's read 1 Peter 2:13-17 and see four points. (1) Be subject. (2) Use your freedom for slavery. (3) Love, fear and honor. (4) Silence the ignorance.

1. Be Subject and Do Good (vs. 13-15a)

Peter instructs us plainly and simply to be subject to all these human powers over us. It may be a king or a president, a dictator or a governor, a policeman or a tax collector. Regardless, we are to live in subjection to them and do good. Later, he tells us to honor them.

This is easy to say in theory, but this quickly becomes challenging when we don't feel like governments are doing what they are supposed to do. That can be extra difficult because we can vote and we have the right to free speech. Think about it. We are sojourners, visitors and exiles, and yet our vote and the right to free speech can give us this feeling of power in a way that most Christians haven't ever had. In theory, this would be great since we can vote for people we think will do justice. But it also means we can be easily manipulated. Furthermore, most Christians have always just prayed for God's kingdom to come, but it is possible that our vote and free speech could put us in an impatient mindset. We want justice now. Maybe we rise up, rebel, take matters into our own hands.

But Peter focuses us: be subject and do good. I wonder if it was easier for Christians to just be subject, honor their leaders and focus on doing good — doing justice and showing kindness to the people outside their front door — when they had no say in who led them. To be clear, I speak and I vote. But let's recognize that these rights come with a challenge. These rights can lead us to hope more in the kingdoms of this world than we recognize. These rights can cause us to lose focus on real, tangible ways that people's lives can be impacted.

Family, it has never been easy for Christians to be subject. Not long before Peter wrote this letter, the Emperor Claudius had ordered that all the Jews leave Rome, probably because he perceived they were the cause of unrest. And they had to go. From an earthly perspective, they lost everything.

But Peter motivates us to be subject in two ways. First, he says the emperor sends governors to punish those who do evil and praise those who do good. I am painfully aware that there is corruption and injustice even in our governments here. But, as one writer put it, "Even the most

oppressive governments ... hold evil in check to some extent, preventing society from collapsing into complete anarchy.” No, it’s not the perfection of God’s justice. But it’s something.

Second, Peter says in verse 15 that it is the will of God that we be subject. We might be thinking that if we participating in this riot or revolt that we working for real justice and we are going to make things better for the sake of God’s name. We aren’t. What God wants us to do in his name is to be subject and do good. We don’t have to trust them. But we obey them.

Now, of course, that does have a limit. We may find that limit in our lives. We will not stop praying, singing, preaching, reading God’s word and assembling. We will not stop spreading the good news. We will not change our teaching based on societal norms. But we will be subject.

2. Use Your Freedom for Slavery (vs. 16)

Peter tells us to live as people who are free. This contrasts with Peter’s later conversation about slaves in verse 18. We like our freedom here. We aren’t just in America where we are free from the Brits, we are in Texas where we are free from everyone and everything.

But notice what Peter says. *“Not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil...”* Isn’t that precisely what the world does? The world claims we are all free so we can do what we want to do. I can say what I want, live where I want, spend my time and money how I want, and sleep with who I want. But just because we have freedoms — just because it is legal — doesn’t mean it isn’t evil.

If we want real freedom, that’s found in doing what Peter says next. *“Live as people who are free... as servants [or slaves] of God.”* The means of true freedom is actually slavery. God has released us from being slaves to our passions, pleasures and selfish mindsets. But freedom does not mean, “Do whatever I want because this is ‘Merica.” That’s the same as the old slavery — selfishness. We are to use our freedom to become God’s slaves. And by the way, when we promote that people should do, spend, sleep with, and worship whomever they want, we promote their slavery.

Do we fully grasp the idea of being God’s slaves? I think we can be so used to always getting a say in things that we can forget that when it comes to God, this isn’t a democracy. He’s the master and we are the slave. Our world has a real problem with accepting anyone’s authority over us — let alone God’s. It blew my mind how much disagreement, disrespect and disobedience people got away with when I worked in the restaurant industry. The world’s problem with authority can effect us. We can start to paint God as someone who has no interest in being our master. Fellow slaves, we don’t have a choice. God doesn’t intend for us to be mindless followers, but if God says jump, we say “How high?”

But take cheer! Slavery to God is not a negative. We are going to be slaves of someone — whether to Satan via our own passions or to God via his eternal purpose. Slavery to God is meant to grant us peace and freedom. In the Law of Moses slaves were supposed to be freed every 7th year. But there was a provision for slaves who loved their masters. They could freely choose of their own will to be a slave of their master forever. The master would take the slave to the door and pierce his ear as a signal that he would stay there forever.

Let's be sure we don't fight our master and long for the wrong kind of freedom. No matter how much freedom the government gives us, freedom and legality give no one an excuse for evil; we use our freedom to become slaves of God. Some ramifications of that are found in verse 17.

3. Love, Fear and Honor (vs. 17)

We are to *honor everyone*. We don't just honor people *we think* deserve it. Every single person was created in the image of God, and that demands respect for all: man or a woman, rich or poor, well-educated or not, red-brown-yellow-black-or-white, Republican, Democrat, Independent, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim. We may not agree with them and often times we shouldn't. But we should honor them. Be kind. Treat them with respect. May I add — it is especially when we disagree with them that we should be careful to show honor. We are not “more equal” than anyone. By the way, we are to honor waiters, store clerks and customer service agents.

But we *love the brotherhood*. Here, there is to be an even deeper affection that we are building for one another. In a year when we have been driven apart by the pandemic, I hope we will see so clearly that God has purposed that we be united together in a bond of love. I know we all feel it: love isn't virtual. As we start moving towards normalcy, let us take these words seriously, put our differences aside and *love the brotherhood*. Love the brothers and sisters here and elsewhere. Let's get in one another's lives and enjoy community together, serve one another, counsel and encourage one another. Let's weep and rejoice with one another.

Finally, we are to *fear God and honor the emperor*. Sometimes Caesar does and says things that may make us afraid, but God is the one we are to fear. But Peter specifies that we are to honor the emperor out of all people because there can be such a temptation to dishonor and disrespect authorities. We don't agree with them. We didn't vote for them. They said something foolish the other day. Their policies are poor. But we honor them. We don't slander them. We may disagree with them, but brothers and sisters, can't we disagree nicely? Disagree, but don't be disrespectful! If we resist or even dishonor governing authorities, Paul tells us in Romans 13 that we ought to remember we are resisting what God has appointed.

4. Silence the Ignorance (vs. 15)

The center of this passage in verse 15 offers us one reason why all this is so important. We are exiles, foreigners, sojourners. We aren't like everyone else. People who are different stick out and are often misunderstood, made fun of and even falsely accused. The world is going to say foolish stuff about Christians and we ought not give them a good reason to do it.

But we are Christians! How could people get the wrong idea about us? It's easy. We profess to worship the man who will one day be king of everything. We profess that one day we will no longer be underdogs, but victors reigning alongside the king. We profess that there is a coming judgment. People might think we hate our leaders, that we think they are illegitimate, that we don't appreciate anything they do. They might think we would prefer completely disconnecting from society and that we would prefer anarchy. But that's not what we want. We hope in the government of God, but we recognize that God has put these powers here in this age for a reason.

If we don't want people to get the wrong idea about us, that means we should be careful how we talk. The gospel is shocking, radical and offensive enough, we don't need to add extra offense to it. Let's speak boldly and clearly about what Christians believe, but carefully, respectfully and lovingly so people don't misunderstand us and think we are something we are not. Don't try to be so clever that we forget to be kind.

When our Lord Jesus was before Pilate and Herod he was almost silent. He didn't respond to most of their questions because responding would have meant he agreed to the terms of the game they were playing in the first place. He was so bold in other situations to speak the truth, but when he was on trial, he let the power of a quiet, respectful attitude do the talking.

But let's hear Peter's words: if we will focus on being subject and doing good, the foolish talk with be silenced in the long run. That's the challenge of these votes and this free speech. I imagine it could be a blessing, but more and more I'm struggling to see that. It can cause us to pick and wholly identify with a dog in a fight that is only won by laying your life down. It can distract us from real, tangible action. What if we put all that energy we lost into political conversations into conversations about our hope in King Jesus and actions that show his love to the people around us. Let's not see it as our life's aim to get a particular president in power, but to show the power and love of King Jesus in our lives by helping our actual neighbors.

Conclusion

We are foreigners living under powers that are completely foreign to our way of thinking. But God has called us to live in subjection to them and to honor them along with all people. The day may come where they may try to make us fear them, but we will fear God alone. But while we still live as free people, let us faithfully live as God's slaves. For then, we will be free. For then, Caesar and the powers he has sent will not see us as evil, but they may actually even praise us as those who do good. I offer this reminder from Jeremiah. *"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare"* (Jer. 29:7 ESV). Be subject. Honor everyone. Do good. Silence the foolishness.

Called to Suffer Unjustly (1 Peter 2:18-25)

The past year has opened our eyes to the darkness in the world around us and as such we have talked about how to think about injustice from a lot of different perspectives. We have talked about how the evil gods of the divine council are the powers behind it all. We have talked about how we ought to hope in God to judge these gods and the powers that be. We have demonstrated through John the Baptizer how we wait until the fullness of Jesus' kingdom for final justice. We have talked about how we can show love to the downtrodden and use our voice to promote justice. But I can think of no better capstone to the subject of living in a world of injustice than 1 Peter 2:18-25. Truth be told, I can think of no more shocking a text to end with either. Our text today wraps our focus on justice with a very direct question: how should we think about and respond to injustice against us as individuals? Peter offers an alarming answer.

Peter is writing to Christians scattered like exiles throughout a variety of territories. They were powerless foreigners and had virtually no ability to change their situation. In our text today, Peter speaks to the person who is the epitome of powerless — the servant. But then he zooms out to apply the situation of a suffering servant to Jesus *The Suffering Servant* whom we are all called to follow. Let's start with verses 18-20.

Be Subject to Both Good and Unjust Masters (2:18-20)

Unlike the slavery that took place in our country, slavery then was not racially based. A person could become a servant by being captured in a war, by being kidnapped, born into a slave household, or by selling oneself into slavery to survive economic hardships. Some slaves had very hard labor in fields and mines, others were doctors, teachers, managers, and musicians. As Peter says here, some had kind masters while some suffered brutal mistreatment. Ancient slavery was not more humane than what took place on our own soil. Slaves had no legal rights and masters could do whatever they wanted to them without any legal consequences.

In that light, Peter instructs servants to be subject to their masters — both to the good and to the unjust. Peter shockingly says it is a *gracious* thing to be mindful of God while suffering under these unjust masters. It is a means of pleasing God and receiving a reward from him. That can be hard to remember. Often we may think unjust suffering is a sign of God's displeasure with us, not as an opportunity to please him. And to be clear, Peter does tell us that we don't get any credit with God if we deserved the beating.

Now, I'd like to clearly explain the situation Peter is speaking into. Slaves couldn't quit or call the police when they were being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed and abused because they had no legal rights. Peter's admonition to them to be mindful of God and endure is literally the only thing they could legally do in response to injustice. And, as Peter later says, we don't revile in return. We don't take vengeance. We turn the other cheek.

Paul, on the other hand, was a Roman citizen and when he was illegally beaten in Philippi, he demanded what seems to be a public apology for the injustice. Thank God, as of now, we too often have legal protections when we are treated unjustly. Peter doesn't tell Christian servants to call the authorities because they couldn't and that kind of situation isn't his focus. This text speaks to

those who have no legal protections against the injustices mounted against them. A lot of people in the world live in those situations. Many Christians live in these situations. We must mentally prepare for the possibility that this may also be the world we live in at some point. I don't mean that we will be slaves, but that Christians may at some point lose the legal protections we now enjoy in society, in the church, in school, in the home, and on the job. There is the possibility that more we become like even more like foreigners here.

Regardless of our situation or why we suffer unjustly, Peter offers an inspiring message that we can ingest and that we can share with others who suffer unjustly. He offers two things in verse 20. **1) Keep doing good.** It is not the same, but employees should do the same with their employers. Whoever is over you, keep honoring them. Keep working hard whether they are just or not. **2) Endure.** We could unjustly suffer, but then turn and curse God or the person causing our suffering. We could lose our hope, give up, stop doing good. That's not endurance. How can we keep doing good and endure? Verses 19-20: be mindful of God and recognize this is a gracious thing in his sight. I almost called this sermon "The Grace of Unjust Suffering." This is actually a gift. You will get credit in God's eyes if you endure.

This is where the rubber meets the road. It is a piece of cake to obey gentle masters and employers. It is easy to submit to just governments. Sinners do that. When we endure these sorrows but keep doing good, that is what the world is unwilling to do. There is no benefit to them to "go the extra mile" in suffering. But we? When we are mindful of God, we get credit.

This reminds me of what Peter heard Jesus say in Luke 6. Note that the word *charis* is translated as "gracious thing" in Peter is translated as "benefit" and "credit" in Luke. **Luke 6:32-36 ESV**, *"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."*

If we really want our lives to be gracious in God's sight, we keep enduring and doing good when it is hard and when it comes at great cost and difficulty to us. Let that motivate us in this ever-changing world. Our wealth, social standing, and even our lives may be threatened for doing the right thing. This is an opportunity to show God whether we want a good times in this life, or the reward that he gives in the age to come.

Called to Follow Christ: Suffer for Doing Good (2:21-25)

We might argue that up to this point, Peter is talking about a situation that seems completely unrelatable for many of us. Maybe we feel good. But notice verse 21. Did Christ suffer unjustly for you? Did he continue doing good and endure? If so, we have all been called to suffer unjustly. Peter says Christ left us "an example." When Children in school would trace over their teacher's writing to learn to write, they used this Greek word (*hupogrammós*). The idea isn't that we generally look to Jesus' general example. The idea is that his life has written down the precise pattern by which we are to live. He suffered unjustly and we follow in his steps.

What does that look like? In verses 22-25, Peter weaves together different themes from the heart of Isaiah's song about the suffering servant that was read for us earlier (Isaiah 53:4-9). Peter was talking to servants, but now he speaks about Jesus as *The Suffering Servant of God* whose life we are all to follow when any of us suffer unjustly in any situation.

What do we do when we are beaten unjustly? When we are mocked without cause? When we are persecuted for doing good? When someone in our family or workplace or community hates us and cuts us down without cause? Notice **verses 22-23**. We might get into arguments and start stretching the truth to make our point, *but there was no deceit found in Jesus' mouth*. We might trade insults — trying to come up with something that will get under our attacker's skin, but Jesus *did not revile in return*. We might threaten, "Just see what happens!" "You'll pay for that." "One day you'll regret this." But when Jesus suffered, *he did not threaten*. How did he do that? "*He continued entrusting himself to the one who judges justly.*" The only way we can endure such abuse and hostility from sinful people and not repay insult for insult and evil for evil in return is by trusting that God truly judges justly and one day he'll take care of this.

But lest we think Jesus was on the cross craving immediate justice, Jesus called upon the Father for their forgiveness. Jesus didn't simply "not hate" his enemies, he loved them. He simultaneously waited for God's justice and hoped for his enemies' restoration at the same time.

Jesus is showing us a new way of being human. He is showing us love that completely transcends anything we have ever seen before. If I am reading 1 Kings 1-2 correctly, not even David could go to the grave without wanting a little revenge. Since the beginning of the world people have exchanged tit for tat. Lamech boastfully sung to his wives about how he murdered a young man who hit him. And that's what can happen with us, right? We suffer — maybe even unjustly — and we concoct new ways of making them pay worse than they ever hurt us. It grows into this messy world of hurt, bitterness, and hatred. But Jesus takes the worst injustice that has ever been committed and he doesn't return the evil. He did not sin. He quietly took it. In doing that, he ended the cycle.

The result was the most powerful death you can imagine. Notice **verses 24-25**. He didn't spit our sins back at us, he took them, bore them in his body. And here was his hope. Whereas there was once hatred, enmity, bitterness, strife, his hope was that we would see his example and want to do likewise. His death on the cross was not simply an atoning sacrifice that took away our sin — that's not Peter's key point here. It was the beginning of a new way of living. He showed us how far he was willing to go to not sin so that we too would die to sin and let righteousness live in us. He was so unwilling to sin that when he was lied about, falsely accused, mocked, beaten, crucified, and spat upon he professed his undying love for the people who killed him.

Have his wounds healed us? Have his wounds quenched our bitterness, hatred, and desire for revenge? His wounds have turned away God's wrath — have they turned away ours? God no longer seeks justice against us. He declares us innocent because of Jesus' death. And we are called to follow in his steps.

Think about what could happen in this world if all 2 billion of the people who claim to follow Christ followed him to the cross. Imagine what would happen if we could show that kind of love

to everyone — even toward the oppressors of this world. Imagine what would happen to the tensions between nations. Imagine what would happen to the weapons industry. Imagine what would happen to political conversations and conversations about justice in this country. Imagine what could happen in our homes, in our marriages, between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters.

This sounds like fairy tale dreaming to some, but if we will have faith and hope, we will see this is God's vision for the church and this is God's vision for the world. *"In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's house will be the highest of all— the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship. People from many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob's God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths." For the LORD's teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem. The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore. Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD!"* (Isaiah 2:2–5 NLT)

As Isaiah heard this message about what God wanted to do for all nations, he looked at Israel and urged them, "Let's walk in the light of the Lord!" Just as Jesus absorbed our sins and disarmed the great oppressors of this world in doing so, if we will take on the sins of others and point them to Jesus the true sacrificial lamb, it is possible that they might die to sin and live to righteousness too. The oppressors of this world are straying just as we were straying, but a Shepherd and Overseer has died for them and is ready to direct them on a new path and rescue their souls.

Conclusion

Richard Wurmbrand was a Christians who was imprisoned for 14 years by communists for preaching the gospel. He talks of how between beatings, some of the prisoners had agreed that they would preach the gospel to their captors. He tells the story of a woman who did that. Between beatings she spoke kindly to the guard and preached the gospel to him. He mocked her. She told him that she had a boyfriend who had showed so much love to her that it didn't matter how much this man beat her, she could only love him. He hit her across the head and knocked her out. When she awoke he said, "You stupid girl, who is this boyfriend of yours?" So she told him about Jesus. The man was immediately baptized.

We are called to suffer unjustly whether we are slaves of men or not, for we are slaves of God. We will all suffer, but what good is it when we suffer for our own sin? Like Jesus, let us choose to suffer as much as possible not for our sins but for the sins of others. Jesus has healed us by his wounds, and we never know what could happen in the lives of others if we will follow in Jesus' footsteps and accept the wounding they give us.

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father." (John 14:12 NLT)

Imperishable Beauty (1 Peter 3:1-6)

“The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald.” In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and anklets and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls. Instead of fragrance there will be a stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding.” (Isaiah 3:16-24 NIV)

The past century has seen a remarkable transformation in practices, values, and in how relationships inside and outside the home operate. An extract from a 1950's Home Economics Book demonstrates how much marriage has changed. The piece offers “Tips to Look After Your Husband.” In preparation for a husband's return from work, wives should “Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh looking,” Comb the children's hair because “they are little treasures and [your husband] would like to see them play the part.” “Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soft, soothing, and pleasant voice.” This may sound like a joke today, but this was literally textbook material then. As a husband, I can say this sounds great. However much wives may want to make their husbands happy, this likely sounds impossible.

Articles like this only reinforce our belief that what is old and traditional is out. And since many perceive that every past value or practice in America arose from Christianity, this can distort our vision and put us in a challenging position. People actually often associate unreasonably high demands for wives and the inconsiderate behavior of husbands with traditional Christian values. We are foreigners called to practice consistent ethics within the ever-shifting culture around us. We live in Babylon, but we don't conform to Babylonian thinking. Peter has been addressing how we do that in our relationships. How should wives live in an ungodly world that constantly tells its own secular version of what is good without being conformed to it? Peter is going to offer three points here: be subject to your husbands, pursue imperishable beauty, and look to past examples.

Be Subject to Your Own Husband (3:1-2)

Be subject to your own husband. Saying that causes all sorts of questions to come up. **First**, this is not a general command to all men and women. There are certainly ways men and women in should treat one another; however, a wife is to be subject to her husband, not to all men. **Second**, there will be unique ways submission plays out in each marriage and culture, but it is not grounded in cultural practice but in eternal truth. This isn't discussed here, but rather in Ephesians 5. **Third**, submission is a statement about the role a wife plays and the role a husband plays, it has absolutely nothing to do with a man or woman's value, ability, intelligence, or competence. Husbands, God doesn't tell wives to submit to you because he thinks you are smarter. **Fourth**, Satan always wants us to view God's commands in a negative light. Especially today, wives, it would be very easy to hear everything Peter says here in a negative light. But God's commands are for our *good*, so we should serve him with our whole heart (Deut. 10:12-13).

Peter brings out one possible *good* of living in subjection to your husband. Say your husband is not obeying the word of God. Maybe you married him before you started following Jesus and he didn't follow. Or maybe he says he's a Christian, but is not acting how he should. You have told him that Jesus is Lord and that he should obey the Lord, but your words don't seem to be helping anymore. *Your submission and your respectful and pure conduct may win him without a word.*

It's tough any time someone we love isn't obeying Jesus. We love them and want them to change. Living with and respecting the authority of a husband who isn't obeying the word is probably the toughest. Wives, you may be tempted nag him or use passive-aggressive manipulation to get him to change. Peter doesn't say you should never respectfully encourage him with the truth, but Peter is trying to get you to see a new perspective and try a new tact. Sometimes we Christians can talk a big talk about how great God and his word are. And we should. We should study the Bible and talk about the Bible because it is the only way we can adopt a true perspective on God, the world, others, and ourselves. But if people we love — whether your husband, wife, mom, dad, son, daughter, brother, sister, neighbor, roommate, or friend — aren't hearing and obeying, be quiet! No one likes to be badgered. If Jesus and his commands are so perfect, show them. Wives, your husband has no excuse for being a brute or for being disobedient to God, but badgering him won't help. Husbands, the same is true for our wives.

So, be subject, respectful, and pure. But what if he doesn't deserve it? **Colossians 3:23-24** says, *"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."* Don't respect your husband's authority because he deserves it, but because the Lord Jesus Christ deserves it. I like how Schreiner put it (NAC, 152, summarizing Slaughter). "Wives do not submit in order to satisfy a husband's vanity or to promote his reputation. Neither do they submit to show how godly they are, nor to avoid conflict, nor to impress the neighbors, not to manipulate their husbands, and not even because she thinks he is wise. She submits because of her relationship with and trust in God."

Let me highlight one thing he said: don't do good to manipulate. Our loved ones may be moved by how we treat them, but they can tell if we are just trying to manipulate them. We need to quietly change our behavior because we need to obey God. We'll be doing what we should do, and *maybe* they'll see God's goodness in the undeserved favor we show them. In **verses 3-4**, Peter continues describing the conduct a wife — and any woman — should clothe themselves with.

Adorn Yourself with Imperishable Beauty (3:3-4)

Peter is trying to help women focus on the beauty that matters — not outward beauty, but the beauty of her character. We could read this as an absolute prohibition against hair braids and gold jewelry, but reading the sentence structure like that would also mean Peter is prohibiting all clothing, so that doesn't work. This is a common "not-but" construction. He is using a contrast to help women adorn themselves with beauty that lasts and pleases God.

Men, please do consider these principles for yourselves. But why does Peter address this to women? Why are women especially in danger of focusing on outward beauty? There may be various reasons. *Maybe* you know you can catch people's eyes, so why not *really* catch their eyes? Or *maybe* all anyone has ever praised you for is your beauty. We are teaching women what is most

valuable when this is what we always praise. We should tell our kids they are handsome and beautiful, but have you ever noticed how with little girls we can tend to tell them how beautiful, cute, and sweet they are, but maybe we don't praise them for being kind, clever, funny, smart, bold, respectful, or industrious? Or, women, *maybe* you are especially vulnerable here because you are more aware of your true shortcomings than men. As much as our world tells us that we are all already have beautiful hearts, we know deep down that's not fully true. Yes, we are God's children made in his image. Yes, Jesus Christ died for us because we are precious to him. But Jesus also died for us because Satan has made our hearts quite ugly. *Maybe*, women, you are more aware of that and obsessing over stylish clothes, hairdos, jewelry, and makeup distract us from that uncomfortable truth.

Peter doesn't outlaw nice clothes, but Paul specifically does warn against nice clothing in **1 Timothy 2:9-10**. "*I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*" Again, this is a not-but construction which is meant to urge women to adorn themselves with good works and not be so concerned with outward appearance. But at some point we have to ask, why does this keep coming up? If Peter and Paul aren't trying to make *any* point at all about what a person should and shouldn't wear, why specifically talk about elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, and expensive clothes?

Consider how Isaiah talked about the women of Jerusalem from our Scripture reading. The women of Zion - Jerusalem - were beautiful and had nice things, and they wanted everyone to see it. They were stylishly clothed with all the right accessories, but they weren't clothed with kindness, justice, and good deeds. This outward focus distracts us from true beauty.

Women, Satan is at work in the culture actively trying to distract you from clothing yourself with the imperishable beauty of a *gentle and quiet spirit* by instead offering you the clothing and hairstyle of a *flashy, head-turning woman*. We must take care that our craving to be noticed does not lead us to, in how we dress, style our hair, and accessorize, to construct an image of ourselves for others to worship. This is what Instagram is all about — it is the temple and we are the gods.

Now, we know the temptation here is not just obsession over looking nice. We can also turn heads if we look sexy. I know from being with Ashley when she shops for herself and our girls: it is hard to find clothes and bathing suits that are not intentionally designed to show off your body. Clothing designers are intentionally trying to make you look sexy — but don't let them entice you to entering into our world's beauty pageant or swimsuit contest so you can be objectified. Your beauty is a precious gift from God — it is great that you are beautiful! — but your sexuality is exclusively for your husband just like your husbands eyes are exclusively for you.

Husbands, dads, moms — we need to lead by example here. Are we being vain about how we look with our hair, clothes, and accessories? Satan is attacking our family and we also need to be willing to have hard conversations. Are our kids being vain? The idolatry of self is far more insidious than drugs and alcohol. I love how Paul offers us the example of not wanting people to be impressed with us. False apostles in Corinth were always boasting about themselves without reason, but Paul, even though God gave him great revelations, he never boasted about them. Why? **2 Corinthians 12:5-6 NLT**, "*That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will*

boast only about my weaknesses. If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message." Paul doesn't want to boast about this because he doesn't want people to be impressed with him. What he really wants is for people to be impressed with Jesus. Are we dressing like we want people around us to be impressed with us, or with Jesus? Does our appearance exude humility? What do we want people to notice about us?

Peter's aim is **not** to cause you to be self-conscious about how you dress. He's not even trying to get women to dress frumpily. Satan does twist and misuse beauty, but God created your beauty. Peter's whole point is that our external dress simply isn't important. So, seriously consider what you wear — whether it is appropriate or not. Ditch what isn't, and move on. And don't fall back into the cycle of obsessing over your image. Most importantly, sit with these texts God has given us. Meditate on it. It is so easy to let cultural norms shape our view of texts like these. Let the text speak for itself. Let it prick your heart where it intends to.

Focus on the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. It is easy to be externally beautiful. A little bit of money, time, and work — and the most simple among us can turn heads. We all have that power in our hands. But God is urging us to use our time and energy to adorn ourselves with beauty that will never fade or grow old. In God's *sight*, a gentle and quiet spirit is very pleasing.

An Old-Fashioned Example (3:5-6)

What we have talked about may seem old-fashioned because it is. Notice **verses 5-6**. We are often surrounded by people who are more concerned with clothes than character. And often we don't fit in. But women who clothe themselves with this character will fit into an old-fashioned community of holy women. Sarah obeyed Abraham. She even called him "lord" (Gen. 18:12).

Note Sarah's obedience. I know this is tough to hear, but being submissive to your husband does not simply mean being nice. It does mean obedience. Being obedient doesn't mean you never disagree — Sarah did vocally disagree with Abraham. That's what makes her example even more shocking and impressive: she disagreed with him, he made some massive blunders (he asked his wife to refer to herself as his sister!), and yet she obeyed him and called him lord.

Sarah didn't obey Abraham because he was a superior human being. Notice verse 5. She did this because she hoped in God. She didn't know how Abraham's decisions were going to turn out — like leaving her land and trusting God would care for and multiply them in a new place. That's scary stuff. *But hope in God is the energy that drives out fear. Fear is the tool of Satan — can we see how fear has turned our world upside down? Fear makes sin seem completely logical. But hope in God is the fuel surging through Christians causing them to do all sorts of counter-cultural things in the face of fear.*

Fears will come, but how you deal with them determines everything. You could give into fear about how your husband manages finances. You could give into fear about where he decides to move or how he runs your home. And husbands — you're a fool if you don't consider your wife's opinion. But, wives — obey because your family's future does not rest in your husband's hands, it rests in God's hands. God has promised to raise you up from the dead. God has promised to bring us all with him into his presence. The New Jerusalem is pictured as a place where the elderly

happily sitting in the streets that are filled with boys and girls playing. However God fulfills that vision, *let that happy, God-based hope drive away all your fears*. Your hope for a safe, happy family is not completely in this life in Houston, TX — it is in the age to come in the New Jerusalem where God will fill all these good desires you have for yourself and your family.

Join the community of holy, old-fashioned women who *hoped in God* and adorned themselves not with flashy apparel, but with a gentle and quiet spirit which pleases God.

Husbands, Honor Your Wives (1 Peter 3:7)

I grew up in a home with three other brothers, but no sisters. Ashley travelled to Arkansas to meet my family in the summer of 2009 in between our sophomore and junior years of college. One day we went canoeing and then came back to the house to play a card game named “Nerts.” It is a fast-paced game and it always got rowdy in my family. We called names, slapped, pushed, threw cards. It was great. After we cleaned up, I realized Ashley had disappeared. I found her in her bedroom crying. “You guys are so mean! You all hate each other!” I was confused — we just finished playing the most amazing game of Nerts ever. “No we don’t, we were just having fun!” She replied, “Then why is your mom crying too?”

We are in exile. Peter has addressed us as foreigners who need to live very carefully as God’s minorities in the majority society. If we don’t, we will give the world reason to slander us. But if we will live in a distinct, honorable way, we may actually turn the world so that they actually glorify God with us. In particular, Peter has been instructing us about our relationships — being subject to governing authorities, to masters, and wives to husbands. In each situation he has carefully spoken to people who have no power and honored them with special encouragement to do what is right. For husbands, he has one very direct sentence that ought to sober us up really quick. Peter offers two instructions and two reasons why husbands should obey.

Do: live with your wife in an understanding way

We men like to be the authoritative experts in our field. We don’t want to look dumb. We want to be competent. But do we understand our wives? If not, how can we live with them in an understanding way? Do you remember how you treated her when you were still dating? You were sensitive to her needs and careful with your tone. You tried to avoid misunderstandings. You wanted her to know her likes and dislikes. Now, many wives stop expecting anything thoughtful from their husbands because it is too painful to keep being let down.

Ashley’s sister is getting married this summer and it has been neat to watch how she and her fiancé interact — they are always very considerate of one another. They are friends. They flirt. When they disagree about something, they laugh at their differences. There is not supposed to be a dissonance between then and now.

Husbands, you might be thinking: she’s too complicated, too sensitive, I don’t understand her, she does things wrong. We don’t have to be Christians. Nobody is twisting our arms. But if we are going to do this, we need to remember who we are doing this for. We are doing this for the Lord (Col. 3:23-24). When we study our wives, figure out what makes them tick, and live with them in a considerate way, this is one way we show the Lord we respect him. Furthermore, Paul says, “*He who loves his wife loves himself.*” Not only are we hurting her if we do not live with her in an understanding way, we are hurting ourselves.

Do: show honor to her as the weaker vessel

Do you have things in your home that are considered prized possessions? Valuable things that you handle delicately? For us, it’s our premium Bibles. Premium Bibles are actually more sturdy and

durable than cheap, economy Bibles, but that doesn't mean we are careless with them. We read them, but there is a certain care and reverence for how we deal with them. We don't leave them outside. We don't let the kids play with them.

I don't know that Peter is saying that our wives are actually weaker than us. He could be pointing to the fact that women can generally tend to be weaker in body, in boldness, and in social standing, so you need to make sure you honor her. Or maybe he's saying you should honor her as if she were a delicate vessel — whether or not she actually is.

Either way, do we realize the weak, vulnerable position our wives are in? She has left her family and she's trusting you. Do we honor her? Do we uplift her in front of the kids? Do we open doors for her? Get out of the way when she is working? Do we praise her? Do we show her she is precious to us in what we do for her, buy for her, say to her? By the way, this is really easy to do in front of other people or to post on social media. It is another thing to do this behind closed doors.

How do we treat her when the doors are closed? Do we speak to her like she's our slave — giving her deadlines, criticizing her, acting like she is dumb? It's one thing to meekly lead her with respect. It's another thing to act like she's an employee that we have to manage. Yes, because that's why women get married — they are a helpless little lambs wandering around the countryside looking for a beau to rescue them and tell them how to cook, clean, and spend money.

Peter isn't just calling us to *not* treat her like a slave, he's telling us to honor her. Honoring our wives means praising not criticizing them. It means thanking them for the meals they make and for the other unseen things they do. It means doing the dishes for them. It means recognizing she is just as intelligent as you and treating her as such. It means she gets the same amount of spending money as you or more whether or not she works a paid job — because she works just as hard or harder than you. It means we don't give her the leftovers of anything.

Here's a good time for a reminder: Proverbs 31 wasn't written to tell wives how to be perfect, it was a mother helping her son see that he has the ideal wife and he had better reward and honor her for that. **Proverbs 31:28–31 ESV**, *“Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”*

Peter offers **two reasons** why it is vital for us to treat our wife in this way.

(1) Since They Are Heirs With You

Wives have weaker frames, quieter voices, and a submissive role, and so that can lead us to think differently, but they are heirs with us. This may be saying she is an heir of the same reward in the age to come, or it may be saying she is an heir in life with us right now. Either way, she has the same standing before God as we do. Look at your wife as your sister in Jesus Christ. She stands on the same footing as you now. And in the age to come, she will stand on the same footing as you then — you won't be bossing her around. In fact, if we are bossing her around now, we likely won't be heirs with her of eternal life, and we aren't heirs with her now.

(2) So That Your Prayers Aren't Hindered

Prayer is precious communion between us and God and we sever it when we do not honor our wives and live with them in an understanding way. Do you ever feel like there is a wall between you and God? Can you unashamedly come to God's throne and pour your heart out? Beg of him what you need and offer praise to him and have 100% confidence he hears you? Does it ever seem that God doesn't have your back?

"Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:1-2 NIV) When we do not treat our wives properly, our prayers are hindered. Or, as my brother put it, husbands who mistreat their wives do not have a relationship with God.

Reminder: Keep Your Conduct Among the Gentiles Honorable (2:12)

Consider the ramifications of the fact that this is how Peter started this section in 2:12, *"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."* The church *should* be known as a place where wives, sisters, and daughters are honored and protected as precious to us.

And yet this is not always our reputation. The world often associates unreasonably high demands for wives, the inconsiderate behavior of husbands, and the mistreatment of women with traditional Christian values. Sometimes, this is an unfounded misunderstanding. Sometimes, this is an accurate evaluation of Christian husbands. A Christian woman spoke to me about this last year. She asked "Why is it that women have a voice to deal with inappropriate behavior everywhere in the world except the church?" We are supposed to honor women as the weaker vessel, and yet, she said, "A lot of women and girls are left to their own devices to deal with inappropriate behavior," as if they have the same brute force and social standing as we men do.

Men treating women improperly is a big problem in Christendom. Many wives are broken by how their husbands are treating them. When we don't confess our sins and repent of our wrongs against any woman, we cause shame to come upon Christ's church and Christ's name. Women — if your husband or a man here is not treating you right, let's talk to him together. Brothers, sometimes we need another man to remind us how to treat our wives, don't we? And if you are in danger, call us, but first call the police. If he gives excuses or threatens you, ignore it. First Samuel 15 and 2nd Samuel 12 can show you the difference between real and fake repentance.

The woman I spoke with made an interesting observation. "Women are conditioned from a young age to believe that it is acceptable for men to yell at women based on how their fathers speak to them and their moms." How we talk to and treat our wives now teaches our sons how they should treat their mother, sisters, their future wife, and their future daughters. It teaches our daughters what we believe is acceptable. Do we want our daughters to marry a man that treats them like we treat our wives?

I grew up in a home where it was 100% evident: when Dad got home he could not wait to see Mom, and Mom could not wait to see him. When he got home, we had to sit there and watch them

make out in the kitchen. Often, he didn't make it out of the entry way from the garage before Mom met him. That has drastically affected how Ashley and I interact. If your wife isn't excited to see you, maybe it's because you aren't a very pleasing person to be around. Brothers, let us keep our conduct honorable so that the church will praise Christ and his church, not mock them.

Woe Is Me (Isaiah 6:1-5)

Have you ever had the experience where you speak rudely to your spouse and then you suddenly realize that someone else heard you? It's embarrassing. Isaiah had a worse moment. One day Isaiah suddenly found himself in God's heavenly temple where the Lord was high and lifted up and seraphim were praising God as "holy, holy, holy." There, he had the most horrible realization. *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* (Isaiah 6:5) And afterwards a seraphim atones for his sin with a burning coal so that he can actually be in God's presence, but I want you to notice something else: *he is horrified by the words that have passed his lips.* Our sins cannot be atoned for if we do not repent, and repentance is not saying sorry and giving excuses — it's making an embodied change in how we think, act, and talk. And we are not going to repent like that if we are not genuinely horrified by the words that have passed our lips, as Isaiah was. We have all said, "I should do better." But is it time rather to be horrified and say, "I am lost"?

Brothers, let me recommend a practice. Get up 15 minutes earlier, go to your closet, sit on the floor, read a chapter from the Bible, and pray about it. I have found there is something very humbling about that time when I have taken it. I feel naked before God. And feeling that way will help us be humble, gracious brothers to our wives. This may make the difference between whether God hears any of our prayers, or not. Let us honor God in our exile by how we treat women. Let's change our reputation and give the Gentiles a reason to glorify God with us.

Dwelling in Unity (1 Peter 3:8; Psalm 133)

When we were younger there were certain kids shows we weren't allowed to watch. Even some kids shows make bad attitudes seem normal. The show "Rugrats" was like that. The characters were hostile to one another — always fighting and whining about something. However realistic that may be, my parents could see a difference in how we brothers treated one another after watching shows like that.

We are not of the world, but we do live in the world. The world is always carrying on doing its thing, and we are onlookers. Living as foreigners in the world carries the challenge of ensuring we don't bring worldly attitudes and ways of relating to others into the church. Since the past year has brought a lot of strife into a lot of churches — including this one — let's slow down and look at the attitudes Christ expects us to embody towards one another from 1 Peter 3:8. After we do that, we'll look at a short Psalm that celebrates the goodness of unity.

Traits of Like-mindedness (1 Peter 3:8)

Each of these traits is needed for us to dwell in harmony and unity together.

Unity of Mind. This means we are on the same page. Our theology and beliefs are united. How we look at the world — united. How we think about the crazy stuff going on in the world — united. We will disagree at times, but since Peter commands us to have unity of mind, disagreement means two things. *First, it means we are going to be purposefully united in mind and spirit despite the difference.* There are places where we cannot have differences (*cf.* Eph. 4:4-6), but Romans 14 shows us there are places where we can see differently. The world and even sometimes other Christians are going to tell us, "That's absolutely absurd that they think this about that!" But, often, we need to choose to be united. But, *second, the command to be united in mind means that we prefer to **not** have to agree to disagree.* Sometimes we may think, "Well, her voice inside says this and my voice inside says this, it can't be helped!" God tells us, "No! Get on the same page! Have unity of mind!" Unity of mind is actually a choice.

Coming out of the pandemic, we have work to do. We all know that after 14+ months apart, things aren't the same. None of us is the same. I'm actually really excited that our unity has been totally shaken up. Think about it, God has given us a fresh opportunity to find unity in Jesus Christ. I see how in *some* places our unity before was based on general friendliness and humor. God let Satan kill that unity and I am so glad because it will be his demise — let's not try to reconstitute it. Oh, God wants us to laugh together, but not for the same reasons. The Spirit is forming each of us into his likeness so we can fill the world with images of God so people — whether they like it or not — can't help but feel that they are walking around a temple. Everywhere there are these weirdos whose purpose in life in the glory of God in all things. Let's unite under that, exiles! Let's own our weirdness. In that vein, just make a choice today to have unity of mind with Jesus Christ's church. Let's leave behind independent, disconnected, uncommitted behaviors. Get in with the community. Let's study together in our Bible classes. Let's live it out together the rest of the week as we preach King Jesus to this hopeless world.

To be united in mind, we need **sympathy** — the ability to feel what one another is feeling so we understand them and where they are coming from. Sympathy and understanding has been lost in our quarantined, virtual, judgmental, and sectarian world. Everyone is always making harsh distinctions between people because of their views on the pandemic, social justice, the election, vaccines. May we make no distinctions except for who is loyally committed to King Jesus and who is not. Let us not make harsh, foolish judgments that divide. Let's sympathize and understand. Someone else may be making a different decision than you. Someone else may believe something differently than you. Understand. Sympathize. Now, their decision may be unwise. Their belief may be objectively wrong. In those situations, sympathy doesn't mean we ignore bad beliefs or behaviors — it means we acknowledge the demonic spirits at work in them without demonizing the person. It means we have emotional intelligence enough to talk to them winsomely.

Unity of mind requires **brotherly love**. If you remember last summer we talked about how God's word is the Father's seed that causes us to be born again so that we are kin. We need to see each other as kin and have the loyalty and affection that comes with kinship. Do we see one another as brothers and sisters? Fathers, mothers, and children? I have appreciated that aspect of our relationship even more over the past year. The world has spewed so much hatred. We have disagreed about some stuff over the past year, but if you are here, it's because you decided that our kindred spirit matters more than our differences. Peter will say in 4:8 that "*love covers a multitude of sins.*" Our familial love for each other will get us past the toughest times — even if when we sin against each other.

There are things Ashley and I need to do better as leaders of our family. There are things Willa and Ruth certainly need to do better. But we are family and so we are going to grow and make changes together. We need to grow together as a church and do things better. But if we have all been reborn as children of the same Father, we do that together. Thank you for not caving to the pressures of cancel-culture and for prioritizing brotherly love.

Unity of mind requires that we be **tender-hearted and compassionate**. Serving King Jesus means caring for the little people and people who are in pain. People in the world are tripping over one another to get to the top, but the greatest among us is the one who serves. Look around the room to the people who don't feel like they belong, the people who are going through a tough time. Understand them. Be compassionate.

Finally, we must have a **humble mind**. Did you know that humility was not valued in the ancient world? It was seen as a sign of weakness. If you had any self-respect you would defend and promote your own personal honor. This way of thinking is making a comeback over the past year because being wrong or not woke is social suicide. We always have to posture as if we really do know and understand things that we really don't. We have to act as if we were really right all along. We cannot admit being wrong. I hope we will see that the mercy of Jesus allows us to let go of that. Trusting the mercy found at the cross of Christ allows us freely see and admit where we have been wrong. Let's have a lowly, accurate estimation of ourselves.

Now, let's remember why all of this is important. It's important so that we have *unity of mind*. Does unity really matter? That's a hard sell in our Western culture. The West is so individualistic. Sympathy, brotherly love, tender-heartedness, and humility all assume that we have a high

commitment to the good of the community over ourselves as individuals. On this, I thought one commentator summed up the challenge of putting this into practice.

“These are qualities that presume a high commitment to the stability and well-being of the community. Modern Western concepts of individualism tend to trump commitment to community. Where commitment is found, it is often evaluated in terms of individual needs. An individual whose needs are no longer met by a community terminates the “commitment” and seeks a new and more obliging group. Such thinking runs counter to the qualities of 3:8. Like-mindedness implies a willingness to conform one’s goals, needs, and expectations to the purposes of the larger community.” (Jobes, 287-88)

Do you see her point? When the world is committed to a larger community, it is because we have judged that community to serve our individual needs. And when that community no longer meets our individual needs, we sever our ties and find a group that will meet our needs and bend to our will. I cannot over-stress both how common this thinking is and how contrary it is to Peter’s thinking. For us to be like-minded, we must be willing to conform our “goals, needs, and expectations to the purposes of the larger community” of Christ. Jesus did not die on the cross because it suited his needs and made him feel good. Paul did not travel the world preaching the gospel because it made him happy. Dorcas didn’t continually make quilts because it helped her express herself through art. Phoebe didn’t travel all the way to Rome with Paul’s letter and give time, energy, and money sacrificially because it would get her recognition.

We must not come here today, or to any classes or events *because we want to*. We must not go to one another’s homes or invite each other into our homes or serve others *because we need to*. We must not get to know our neighbors so we can love them and preach the gospel to them *because it satisfies us*. We may find all this satisfying, or we may not feel that. Either way, professing allegiance to Jesus as Lord is a commitment to set aside our individualistic needs and desires for the good of the community. Let us seek unity of mind together because we value and love the body of Christ, regardless of whether the body of Christ always serves us or makes us feel good.

However, when we are committed to the body of Christ, something great happens. Unity of mind and brotherly love increase. This reminds me of Psalm 133, a Psalm of David.

How Good It Is! (Psalm 133)

Israel was plagued by so much division and disagreement and selfishness and fighting. But I wonder if David, in his crazy experiences, wrote this Psalm from a place of peace in Israel. When brothers and sisters dwell in unity, it is just so good, isn’t it?

David compares that to two things that sound pretty strange to us — oil and dew. The common denominator here is that both the oil and the dew are said three times to *yarad* — to run down, trickle down. Anointing oil smells good and when it is abundant, it would have flowed down from Aaron’s head to his beard even to the collar of his robes so that the good qualities and good smell of oil would spread and trickle down. Mt. Hermon in the north of Israel was quite a distance from Mt. Zion, but there is more moisture in the air there and Mt. Hermon is usually capped with snow. And the picture is that unity is like dew that falls from Mt. Hermon onto Mt. Zion in Jerusalem.

Both of these situations are impossible. David never knew Aaron — he had been dead for hundreds of years. And dew most certainly does not travel 200 miles from Mt. Hermon onto Mt. Zion. These are fantasy-based images of just how good it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity and harmony together. Just as an abundance of oil that might run down Aaron's head to his beard to his robes or as dew might run down from Mt. Hermon to Jerusalem, the refreshing trickle-down effects of brother's dwelling in unity could be described in mythical proportions. What are those effects? Why is this so important? Go back to first Peter.

1. Unity for the glory of God (2:12; John 13:35; 17:21-23). Remember how all this started out in 2:12. Peter is telling us to keep our conduct among the “Gentiles” honorable so that we will bring them to glorify God with us on the day of judgment. The world is watching us to see if we are legit. Our unity is a sermon to the hostile, unbelieving world that Jesus Christ really is in us. Jesus talked about this in the Gospel of John.

John 13:35 (ESV), *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* **John 17:22–23 NLT,** *“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.”*

The world is dubious as to whether the Creator has really sent Jesus. Maybe Jesus was just speaking on his own authority. Maybe he's just another guru. But the Father was truly in Jesus, and when Jesus is truly in each of us, the Father is in us. And when Jesus and the Father are in each of us, we are one. And when we are one, the world is able to clearly see that the Father really did send this Jesus that we confess as Lord. The world can then clearly see that the Father does indeed love them — and how he has expressed that love for them in Jesus. All that happens through our unity because our unity is the litmus test the world will use to see if the power of Creator God is in us. If we aren't, they think Jesus is a sham.

2. Unity for a safeguard against hostility (2:9ff). This is important not only because of what Peter said before, but because of what he will say after. He's about to talk about how we will at times face hostility and suffer for doing good in the world. And we will talk about that next time. But for now, will we see that this needs to be a safe-haven from all the hostility? We have to do violence towards sin. And we have to send wolves running. But the pride, strife, and hostility of the world needs to stay out there so this can be an oasis of Christ-like love and support where the presence of God is experienced and mediated through our presence together.

Will we let down our pride and self-interest? Free up our busy schedules? Re-order our personal commitments for the good of Christ's body? The glory of God in the world depends on it. Let's join in song and in prayer and in Christ-honoring living *together!*

Responding to Insults and Questions (1 Peter 3:9-16)

Part of the message of the gospel is that the God who made the land, the sky, the sea, and the fresh waters is bringing his kingdom and coming in judgment. We are his delegates — priests of the king sent into the world with this warning and with terms of peace. As our neighbors, coworkers, family members, and friends find out who we are, some will be curious and some will even be excited because they have been praying for help. Others will be dubious or even hostile.

In the West, most people haven't minded Christians for some time. Sometimes that's because Christians have been co-opted by the culture. But I hope we have seen in Peter's letter the need to lean into our "foreigner" identity. We should look different. To some we will be a breath of fresh air, to others we will appear goofy, and to others we will seem like a threat to their ways and worldview. Some will ask questions, others will insult and threaten us. How should we respond? Over the next few paragraphs, Peter warns us to be ready to suffer for doing good as Jesus did. Today, he instructs us to (1) repay with blessing and to (2) prepare to defend with gentleness.

1. Insulted? Repay with Blessing (3:9-14)

It is now a given we need to accept today: people will insult us and be evil toward us. But I don't think it helps to *only* have extreme pictures in our head. Ashley and I used to suddenly shape our fingers into a gun and ask one another if we believed in Jesus. That's typically not what happens. Even in the Roman Empire, the test was not only whether you professed to obey Jesus. If you would simply offer a pinch of incense and say, "Caesar is lord," you could often avoid trouble — even if you kept worshipping Jesus. Similarly, today, many people may not mind if we give allegiance to Jesus, as long as we mimic acceptable right, left, or woke ideology. We must prepare to die for Jesus in an *instant*, but it is more likely that cultural powers will tempt us to *gradually* compromise by praising, accepting, and giving jobs to people like them while insulting, stripping community acceptance, and taking jobs away from followers of Jesus. Friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, or even others who claim to follow Jesus will turn on us — do evil and insult.

If we take our cues from the culture, we are going to get even. Yell, call names, publicly slander them. But Peter tell us to not repay evil for evil, insult for insult. Instead, we bless them. We speak well of them and kindly to them. Jesus instructs that we love, pray for, and even greet our enemies (Mt. 5). We want them to know God and repent. We want their family to be well. I read a story of a Christian soldier who prayed and read his Bible each evening in the barracks before going to bed. Another soldier often insulted him for this. One evening, the hostile soldier threw muddy boots at him. The Christian cleaned and polished the man's boots and returned them (Jobes, 291).

It can be hard to act like this among our family, let alone our enemies. If someone gives us a dirty look, it can be difficult to not adopt an aggressive posture, let alone bless them with kind speech. But Peter motivates us: those who bless their enemies obtain a blessing from God.

Peter cites Psalm 34:12-16 as evidence. Saul was wreaking havoc on David's life and on Israel, but it was not within David's authority to deal with Saul (yet). He could have taken an aggressive posture towards Saul, led an open rebellion, or publicly reviled him. Instead, David sought peace by accepting exile: he fled Israel and ended up as a foreigner among the Philistines — at the mercy

of the enemies God had charged him to destroy. And yet, David was a righteous man who continually sought and pursued peace. He cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord's ears were open to his prayer. God delivered him from both the Philistines and from King Saul.

David's experience highlights what is so challenging about repaying our enemies with kindness — the threats of evil people endanger our families and lives in large ways. That's when the gloves come off, right? Handle things in secular ways, right? Insult, post about it, ignore them, slash their tires. No. We keep turning away from evil and doing good. We seek peace and pursue it. We walk by faith and not by sight. If so, God will keep his eyes and ears open to our cries.

If we don't, Peter and David warn us that *"the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."* That should terrify us: the Lord will turn his face against us if we repay with evil! We signed up to follow the Lord who didn't repay with evil when unjustly murdered, so no sin is ever excused!

Peter motivates us further in verse 13 with an optimistic outlook: if we are zealous for what is good, who is there to harm us? If we really love what's good, it is less likely that people will hurt us. That's no guarantee. Plenty of people suffer innocently. "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," (2 Tim. 3:12), but that doesn't mean everyone all the time will hurt us.

With respect to this, Peter offers one final admonition in verse 14. If we do suffer, God will bless us. Don't be afraid or troubled — thinking this isn't supposed to happen, doubting whether we are on the right side, wondering if Christ really is the holy one we keep making him out to be. He is. Suffering for righteousness is standard fare. Fear is healthy, but we are prone to make the biggest mistakes when fear of evil people dominates our minds. Let us bless the evil and be blessed by God: God's blessings are more powerful than their evil. *Next, Peter tells us to prepare for questions.*

2. Questioned? Prepare, Defend — with Gentleness (3:15-16)

We must keep honoring Christ as holy in hostility because it will lead us to prepare to answer people in a way that honors him. People should question us. We are confident in the kingship of Jesus. We are confident in our hope that he will one day come with the angels, raise the dead, punish, reward, and make all things new. We are confident in the victory of God's kingdom over the kingdom of darkness and the kingdoms of men. We are certain of salvation. And this isn't some private Sunday-only religion. This hope reorders how we live, work, and talk Monday to Saturday. And people will ask for an explanation, a reason, a defense of this hope we speak of.

Many of you may be like I was in the past: "Defending our hope sounds great in theory, but I'm scared I won't know what to say. I'm scared they'll get angry. Maybe they have better reasons for not believing than I have for believing." Those are legitimate fears that Peter addresses here.

First, are you afraid you won't be ready? Peter says *always be prepared*. So don't be afraid that you won't know what to say, because Peter says *we can get ready to always be ready*. Peter writes "be ready" because he knows some aren't ready. (But, in reality, it is a lot less likely someone will ask us about a hope we don't feel ready to defend. Our lives won't be changed much by a hope we aren't ready to defend. And we certainly won't bring up a hope we aren't ready to defend.)

How can we *always be prepared*? Well, how could we have a hope we aren't prepared to defend? Maybe we are doing and believing good things without fully knowing why. Why do we go to work? Why do we do good? Have kids? Believe God will raise the dead? How does the message of God's kingdom make sense of reality and of the world? If we aren't prepared to answer those questions, it means we are doing and believing some things without much basis.

So, how can we *always be prepared*? We need to be more thoughtful as we study, believe, and apply the Bible to our lives. *The Bible as a whole isn't a how-to manual for everyday living or salvation* (though it contains some of this). Good Bible study is not simply step-by-step instructions about the nuts and bolts of every-day godly living (though we should do this!). We don't need to know simply what to believe and what to do — we need to know *why* we should believe it and *why* that makes sense. If we don't know that, it is likely we will veer off-course anyway.

To always be ready to answer “why?”, we need to always ask “Why?” Think about how we watch any good series like the Marvel Cinematic Universe or Star Wars (or how we read a series of books). We watch (and read) thoughtfully. We ask why characters are introduced in certain ways at certain times. We propose theories about where its all going before the ends. And when a series like Star Wars goes off the rails and concludes in a way no thoughtful person would have ever imagined, we get mad because the writers didn't create a cohesive story or message.

The Bible *is* cohesive and I fear sometimes we don't read it like that, so we aren't ready to answer questions. God planned general history from eternity and created the world with the end in mind. The Bible is a carefully crafted account of that plan and story and it has wide-ranging implications. We don't have to become Bible scholars to get this — we just need to keep asking *why*? Why tell the story in this way? Why did God save Israel in this way? Why did *John* tell us that Jesus healed *that* person? Why does Genesis begin like that? Why does Revelation end like that? How does this make sense of everything in between? What really is the Christian hope? Why does God want us to be fruitful and multiply — have kids and go to work — until that hope comes? This will gradually build a cohesive worldview that will help us confidently walk in hope and understand why we do it. Keeping asking “why?” and we will always be ready to answer “why?”

Second, are you scared they will get angry? Peter says to *answer with gentleness and respect*. We aren't gentle when our confidence goes overboard. We can be confident without being condescending or pressuring people. Someone at another church texted me yesterday heartbroken because she got her friend to study with her preacher, and her friend is avoiding her now because the preacher pressured her friend — he wasn't *gentle*. But, on the other hand, we will fail to answer with respect when we aren't ready to answer. There are holes in our reasoning, they can see it, we can see it, so we get defensive, attack, or make poor arguments. But, no, if Jesus really lives, reigns, and is coming again, his Spirit must be shine through in our gentle and respectful attitude as we defend our hope.

Third, do you fear they have better reasons for unbelief than you do for belief? Peter instructs that we *make a defense for the reason for the hope in you*. The danger today is that we mistake “gentleness” for not offering a compelling defense at all. Maybe we offer timid suggestions or hesitate to assert concrete facts. Satan won't be timid. Let's be ready with a real defense.

Our emotional longing for and joy in the Gospel is an important part of belief that we can share with people. Tapping into why someone should even desire to believe can actually be a great precursor to even sharing specific evidence. Help a person want to believe and they'll be ready to hear whether they should! That said, we need to be careful about offering feelings-based answers to questions about evidence. We have a song that says: "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart." God has worked in a resurrection in us through his Spirit living in our hearts and that is real, serious evidence of his living. However, I'm not a fan of this line in this song, because it appears to cite a mere feeling in our hearts in response to a question about evidence. There will always be intellectually dishonest people who will mock our hope, but we are asking for mocking if this is our only reply to doubters.

If we are going to be ready with rational, authoritative, biblical answers, we need to study the Bible like that. Keep reading the Bible and asking why — but don't settle for irrational, short-cut answers. I don't mean we should study the Bible scientifically. The Bible is not an encyclopedia. The Bible is literature, theology, and history all-in-one, and each aspect much be appreciated to study it properly. But are we studying and drawing conclusions rationally?

One way to help with that is to read the Bible in community. This community can check us. On our own, you and I make bad Bible interpretations that lead to bad Christian living. However, even that isn't fool-proof. We have all likely sat in Bible classes where, if a genuine seeker was listening, they would leave discouraged because no one was drawing rational conclusions from the text. The authoritative message of the text wasn't communicated. Conclusions were drawn that were full of logical missteps. People wanted the text to feel relevant, they wanted it to say something, they wanted answers to the questions they superimposed on the text, so they cut corners.

If we are all going to make a *defense* for the *reason*, we must remember that Bible study is not only intended to impart hope and transformation — it is! — but it is also intended to inform. If we inform without transforming, we will be unredeemed Bible nerds. But if we aim for transformation without information, we are going to fall on our faces when people ask us why. If we open our Bibles only hoping for our heart, emotions, and daily walk to be impacted without our intellect, we won't be ready with a real defense. Genuine seekers aren't going to buy light, feelings-based arguments. And the secular world won't come at our kids with anything less than powerful, seductive, "fact-based" reasons to leave behind Jesus. Biblical defenses and Christian worldviews can stand up to atheism and secularism, but only if we prepare to defend with reason.

Consider Paul in the last few chapters of Acts as a good example of defending our hope as Peter tells us. Paul was on trial, but he acted like the resurrection was on trial. He refused to treat the gospel as private truths rationalized by feelings. He fully expected the gospel to stand up in court. When he challenged powerful rulers with the gospel, he made them feel uneasy. Our hope rests on Jesus' resurrection. This is an objective, publicly defensible reality. If he's dead, everything falls. If he's alive, everything follows. We must defend why we believe it actually happened in real history and why that makes rational sense within the story of the Bible, the world, and our place in it.

While there are many unhelpful religious books, there are good authors who have carefully considered the evidence for Jesus' resurrection and who have carefully considered the Christian worldview and written well about it. I am happy to offer you recommendations if you want some.

Conclusion

If we will both bless those who insult us and respond to doubters with logical, respectful answers, people who revile us will be put to shame. They will see our cogent answers, respectful attitude, and godly lives and realize there's nothing harmful about us. We are just zealous for what is *good* and for what is *true* for the glory of God. If we will have that attitude even when others are cursing us, God Almighty — who is more powerful than our enemies — will bless us.

Glory after Suffering (1 Peter 3:17-22)

Read Genesis 6:1-13 with me and consider what it would have been like to be Noah and his family before the flood. This is a sad and strange account. Eve previously saw that the fruit looked good when Satan presented it to her, so she took it and ate it. Here, the “sons of God” see that the daughters of men look good, so they take any they want as wives. God immediately expresses displeasure — saying his Spirit won’t abide with man forever. It appears that “Nephilim” — giants — were the result of these mixed marriages. This is admittedly strange. Some say the “sons of God” refer to the godly offspring of Seth going after Cain’s daughters; however, my opinion and the standard Jewish interpretation in Jesus’ day was that these Nephilim were the result of sexual relations between angelic beings and the daughters of men.

Notice **Jude vs. 6–7** ESV, *“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day— just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”* It appears we could say of Genesis 6 that angels did not stay within their own position of authority, left their proper dwelling, and desired foreign flesh as Sodomites later did, and the human women (and their fathers) went along with it. Now, mighty Nephilim, giants, have resulted. The woman’s offspring was supposed to crush the head of the snake and his offspring, but it appears angelic beings — the sons of God — have joined the side of the snake, and are taking over the offspring of the woman by taking these women for themselves.

I recognize this seems strange to us, but this appears to be how Jews saw this event and the world. When you talked about Noah and the angels, this narrative came to their minds (see the first few pages of Enoch). Imagine what it would have been like to be Noah and his family in these days before the flood. Everyone’s thoughts are continually evil. The earth is filled with violence. People and angels are seeing, taking, and sleeping with whomever they want. Fearsome giants are around. Wickedness and death filled the earth, and here they are as a small minority — righteous and blameless. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. How easy do you think that was for Noah and his family? Do you ever think they felt scared by it all? Vulnerable? Isolated? With all the sexual immorality and violence, I have to believe they did.

But God sent the flood to cleanse the earth and rescue Noah and his family from that perverse, and violent generation. Furthermore, it appears God did not spare these sons of God — these angels — either, but has committed them to the chains of gloomy darkness in the deep abyss of hell until the judgment of the great day. All this stands behind our text today in **1 Peter 3:17-22**.

How can we as exiles and foreigners like Noah not give in to fear, discouragement, and pressures when we do good, love and proclaim truth, but are only repaid with hatred, malice, slander, and threats of violence? When the world is only questioning us, listening with respectful curiosity, and sometimes even turning to the Lord, it is hard to understand why anyone might be afraid, discouraged, or even be comforted by a passage like this. But empathy for the experiences of other Christians will motivate us to pray for them and to get ready for the day when we could meet

similar fates. We might lose jobs, family, friends, and be threatened or intimidated for doing and saying what is good and true.

Peter's main thrust here is to help us recognize that if it is God's will it is indeed better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Peter offers two examples of those who suffered for doing good — Jesus and Noah — but who were likewise saved and glorified as we will be. Note, Peter doesn't encourage us in the ways we would naturally expect to be helpful, and yet, the Spirit of God believes we need this, and so, it is an act of true humility to attempt to grasp Peter's thrust here.

1. Christ's Suffering and Glorification

The first example is Christ. He suffered as a sin sacrifice. He was righteous, but he suffered for the unrighteous. He gave himself over to the violent, slanderous, Satan-filled mob. But consider Peter's point here that this was actually good and that the forces of evil did not win. (1) Through his suffering he brought us to God. (2) Though put to death in the flesh, he was made alive — resurrected — by the Holy Spirit. (3) Those evil spirits — the sons of God — who brought sexual deviancy, violent carnage, and idolatry upon the earth? After his resurrection, Jesus went and preached to them. Maybe he proclaimed, declared his victory over them.

Jesus' suffering and death was the **means** by which he brought us to God, experienced the Spirit's resurrection, and had ancient cosmic powers subjected to him. When you see Jesus suffer all that evil and yet you see the good and the victory that resulted, we can say in the midst of fearful oppression and slander and loss, "You know what? Clearly I'm not on the wrong side here. When I suffer for good, I'm aligned with winners who conquer death and cosmic powers." But that's not all.

2. Noah's Flood and Salvation

Second, Noah and his family was, as one writer put it, a "small embattled minority in a hostile world." (Schreiner) He was a preacher of righteousness in a world where everyone's thoughts were continually evil, where violence and might made right, and even a world where it seems that dark spiritual powers had invaded and spread sexual deviancy and raised up mighty giants. Noah likely looked like a fool heralding righteousness and constructing a massive boat. He himself may have woken up some days and wondered what in the world he was doing and if this was really worth it. But this embattled minority was rescued from that wicked world through the ark in the water — God actually ordained those scary, chaotic waters of judgment were actually their salvation. His suffering led to him being glorified as a new Adam over the world.

Peter says that baptism actually corresponds to this. If we can see it, there is a rich picture of baptism here. Think about it. The scary, chaotic floodwaters simultaneously judged the evil world and saved Noah from it, and those same waters save us today. As with the flood, when we are baptized the old man — the old creation — is judged, killed, buried; but as God's Spirit-wind blew and brought dry ground and new life after the flood, by the power of the Spirit and Jesus' resurrection, we come through and out of those chaotic flood waters alive, conscience cleansed.

Just as that small, embattled minority was saved from that corrupt world through its destruction by water, we are saved by the destruction of the old man in that water too. As Jesus suffered, was

killed, and was raised and all rebel powers were subjected to him, we too will be raised up even from death to reign with him — all powers under our feet as well.

Ramifications for Today

I got on Facebook a few days ago to deactivate my account — I feel there is limited fruitfulness for me keeping it any longer. But, before I could, I saw a post from an acquaintance from the Christian college I attended in Florida. What she posted was a logically fallacious attack against an unpopular Christian teaching. Two other Christian friends that we went to school with replied that her argument wasn't sound and they invited further conversation. But then, two more that we went to school with joined the conversations and immediately started mocking their replies and even falsely accusing one of the Christians of promoting heinous practices and beliefs he has never promoted. They misquoted and publicly slandered him. When I urged him to re-consider his slander so we could engage in a friendly conversation about truth, he refused to back down. Then, all three — the author and the two mockers — joined in with the other friends in a final round of mocking.

Fourteen years ago, these were Christians who cared enough to pay — or let their parents pay — good money to attend a private Christian college. But now, they and their friends gang up to publicly slander and humiliate Christians. *“Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me... Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.”* (Psa. 22:12–13, 16-19 NIV) I wish this was the only time I have seen this same thing happen, but this is not uncommon. It's coming. And, as we discussed last time, we have to be ready for a real defense — we can help some of these same enemies with well-informed defenses — but we also have to be ready for when people mock our defenses of Jesus and tear us to pieces. Based on this text, in that day...

1. Remember our baptisms. Noah too preached righteousness and suffered and then when the waters of judgment came, he was brought safely through. There's a reason we declare “Jesus is Lord” with our mouths, there's a reason we believe his resurrection in our hearts, and there's also a good reason our actual bodies are plunged in water. It is a concrete reminder that we have already lived through that old world's destruction and renewal in the flood, we have already crossed through the Red Sea and escaped Pharaoh's army, and we have already entered the death and burial of Jesus at the hands of sinners, and yet come out victorious. At that moment, we appealed to God for a clean conscience and he delivered us through. We are clean. They may accost our ears, take our things, hit our bodies, but we have already emulated and tasted our Noah-like salvation in baptism. In the words of Hebrews 10:22, our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

2. Remember all powers have been subjected to Jesus. When Jesus was raised, he went and proclaimed his victory over those ancient cosmic powers. When evil people slander us, we need to know that the evil powers animating their actions are under Jesus' control. Do not fear! *In a vision*, Daniel sees that the kingdoms of men have become like frightening beasts trampling down the earth, devouring much flesh, and even oppressing the saints. It's a reversal of Genesis 1 where

humans are given dominion over the beasts; but now the humans have become like animals and they are ruling the world. But then the beasts are slaughtered and he sees a human one — a son of man — coming in the clouds and he receives dominion. And then the promise is made that the people, the humans with him will receive dominion too. We are on the bottom now, but through the suffering of Jesus and Noah we see that we are on the right side. We are saved. We will be glorified.

Armed to Suffer and Surprise (1 Peter 4:1-6)

As a minority community, Peter has been preparing us to be both questioned and slandered for our hope and actions by pointing us to Jesus who also suffered the same things. Today, he will tell us to arm ourselves to suffer and to leave behind human passions. Next, he will warn us that, in their surprise, the world will revile and vilify us for not joining them, but that we should not worry because they will have to give an account to God for this. Notice verses 1-3.

Arm Yourself (4:1-3)

Jesus didn't play games when it came to proclaiming the truth. God's kingdom was drawing near and it was time for all to "*sin no more*" (Jn. 5:18; 8:11). So he came "*to bear witness to the truth*" (Jn. 18:37). And yet, though he loved them as his own children, the world hated the Truth. He refused to let lost Israel wander, so he came to turn them from their error; yet, the leaders in Israel twisted his words and falsely accused him of unrighteousness, blasphemy, and of plotting to destroy the temple. They asked for a murderous insurrectionist to be released instead of him, whipped him, dressed him up like a mock-king, stripped him naked, nailed him to a cross, spat on him, and made fun of him.

Peter says we must arm ourselves with Christ's way of thinking. This is not a time to be soft. We need grit, fortitude, and discipline (Schreiner). That sounds easy now, but think through what this may look like. Imagine friends and acquaintances at school or work whispering about you, saying you're a bigot. Imagine how your neighbors will look at you when they think you are phobic. Imagine your online community humiliating you and blocking you for being judgmental. Imagine how the country will charge us of being disloyal and unpatriotic. "You are destroying everything they hold dear."

Here's some good news: when we continually arm ourselves like warriors to suffer in the flesh, something happens in our battle against sin: "*Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of time no longer for human passions but for the will of God.*" When we are willing to be mocked, falsely accused, lose friendships, jobs, lied about and be told "you're no fun," "you're not loving," we show that we are done with sin. We show that our will, your will doesn't matter any more. I'm living for the will of God now, not human passions.

I love how Peter puts it in verse 3: the time that is past suffices for carrying out the desire of the Gentiles. They say we're missing out on the pleasures of Egypt and Babylon, but haven't we spent sufficient time carrying out what they desire? What fruit were we getting from those things we are now ashamed of? We have spent enough time in that way of living.

Can we imagine being a church like that? A church where we proclaim both Jesus' welcome, "You are forgiven" and Jesus' command, "Sin no more" and actually expect that of ourselves and one another? Have you noticed that about Jesus and the apostles? They commanded people to lay down sinful lifestyles immediately. Prostitutes left their business, adulterers went back to their spouses, tax collectors restored what they defrauded, magicians burned their books, persecutors became preachers, masters treated Christian slaves like brothers. That immediate ceasing of sinful lifestyles is *not always* part of church culture today.

I think in the past I failed to deal sin a more decisive end because suffering for Christ wasn't a concrete reality for me. Verse 1: "*Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.*" Proclaiming "Jesus is Lord" has lost its offense — not because the land is filled with true knowledge of him, but because it has been spiritualized and watered down. In the first century, Caesar was called, "Savior," "Lord," "Son of God," and the gospel of his birth and ascendancy was proclaimed everywhere as the beginning of a new day in world history. When Jesus' followers proclaimed the gospel of Jesus in that political environment, they were proclaiming that a Jew charged of insurrection and executed by Rome on a cross is the true Lord, Savior, and Son of God. That was an inherently political statement, so they had to think seriously about where their allegiances lied before publicly proclaiming Jesus is Lord in that world. They had to arm themselves to suffer like the King for the King. If we do that, Peter says it will change us. Who wants to be maligned, vilified for King Jesus while you're still fooling around with Satan?

Personally, I feel that at times in the past I have tried to straddle a line: give allegiance to Jesus, but make it seem less offensive. Yet, I have still lost dear friends doing that. That has streamlined my focus. Family, we will lose those who are not loyal to King Jesus anyway, so why compromise?

We are not yet perfect. Sanctification certainly is a lifelong process. But, if we arm ourselves to suffer like the King, we'll say we're done carrying out the world's desire and ready to live for God's. Now, notice in verses 3-4 the response we will get when we start abstaining like this.

They Are Surprised by You (4:3-4)

We will come back to this list in verse 3 in one second, but let's first emblazon in our minds that people will be surprised by us and they will malign and vilify us. We are destined to be misunderstood by the majority — even by our past friends. "Why don't you come with us any more? Do you think you're better than us? You're not fun. You're not loving. You're not loyal. You're not patriotic. You're phobic. You're causing a disturbance." This will plague our consciences at times. We may wonder, "Why is this so surprising to them? Maybe I am misunderstanding God's will." But, they charged God's own Son of being evil when he was faithful and they'll do the same to us.

Now, let's go back to this list in verse 3. Note the three themes here: sex, alcohol, and idolatry. They typically do not speak evil of us for helping the needy. What surprises them and leads them to malign us is we do not treat sex, alcohol, and creation like they do. Peter sums this up as "flood of debauchery" in the ESV or as "excesses of dissipation" in the NASB. Where we show restraint, they cast it off. *But why does this surprise them?* They've been deceived by Satan — let's unpack how so we aren't deceived by their surprise.

They are surprised we don't join them in sensuality and passionate lusts. Greek and Roman cultures were obsessed with sexuality. It was their religion. It was quite common for men to visit prostitutes or to have their way with their male and female servants. One interesting note: Christianity was actually very popular among women in the ancient world because churches demanded husbands treat their wives better and constrain their sexual energies within marriage. But, apparently, this restraint was bewildering to many - and that is certainly the case today.

While Sigmund Freud's explicit ideas have been debunked, his overriding theory that we are primarily sexual beings has become part of the air we breathe. To live in our secular age is to believe that at the deepest part of our identity and who we are lies our sexuality. (Note that while Rome and Greece were obsessed with sex, but they didn't typically see it as *who they were*) Today, my sexuality is perceived as who I am and how I can be happy. It is the path to freedom, release, and never-ending ecstasy. This message is all over our media. Magazines tell you how to light your sex-life on fire. Books obsess over fantasies. Songs, movies, and shows idolize sexuality as the pinnacle of human happiness all while insisting it should be casual. (Side note: don't use secular erotic songs, books, or movies to "spice up" your marriage. While we may think all is safe within marriage, these things will both subtly and overtly train us to think about ourselves and sexuality in poor ways that are not easy to identify.)

Thus, when we show restraint here and reserve our sexual energies within an undefiled marriage bed, we look strange and prudish to them. Hauerwas explains this well: "It often sounds as if we are somehow 'against [relations].' What we fail to make clear is that ... passion (the good gift of God's creation) is now subservient to the demanding business of maintaining a revolutionary community in a world that often uses [relations] as a means of momentarily anesthetizing or distracting people from the basic vacuity [or emptiness] of their lives. *When the only contemporary means of self-transcendence is [relations], we Christians are going to have a tough time convincing people that it would be nicer if they would not be promiscuous.*" (*Resident Aliens*, 63)

They don't understand why we don't watch porn, sleep with our girlfriend or boyfriend, have open marriages, or why, if one has same-sex attraction, why they don't act on it. The reason the world doesn't understand is because sexuality is often one of their only forms of self-transcendence. When Jesus restores our humanity and our life purpose, sexuality gets put back in its proper place. We are not anti-sex at all. Read the Song of Solomon and don't be a hearer of the word only — it's a collection of songs devoted to celebrating romantic and sexual love in marriage. The Bible offers a beautiful vision sexuality that unites a husband and wife in pleasure and procreation. This view of marriage and sexuality is deeply fulfilling because it honors God and is actually a living representation of the relationship between Christ and the church. But, unless we put romance and sexuality on the throne, many will be bewildered by our restraint.

Furthermore, ***they are surprised when we don't join them in drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.*** For the world, life is difficult and boring and it ends in painful death, so alcohol and parties are how a person has fun and avoids thinking about their meaningless lives. So, they swipe, drink, hit the club, sleep, work, repeat. But with Jesus, life is full of meaning and purpose. It is an adventure that leads through suffering to eternal life. So, we leave God on the throne and have enjoyment without excess or obsession. We have great evenings and weekends without clubs and drinking parties. We enjoy God's blessings even more than they do because we put them in their right place: instead of worshipping creation, we enjoy creation, family, and friends in orderly ways that lead us to praise the one who fills our deepest longings. But, the world only knows how to pursue basic instinctual passions and forget their Creator in the process.

If we will understand their surprise and slander is because they have been deceived, it won't be so surprising and disconcerting to us. And, we'll be able to help them understand better. Now, note the confidence Peter gives us that their slander and our righteous life will not be forgotten by God.

They'll Give An Account (4:5-6)

Right now, it can seem like we are the losers who have no reasonable justification for how we live and speak. But Peter says they are the ones who will have to give an account for their lawless living and for how they treated us. That kind of talk can make us uncomfortable. Some might accuse Peter of reveling in the destruction of the wicked. But the bottom line is that the world often calls Christians to account for their ways and they mock our responses, and, despite how much we want them to see and turn, it is comforting to know the tables will be turned for those who don't.

In view of this day of judgment, this is why the gospel of King Jesus was preached to those who are now dead. Some may wonder, "Why was the gospel preached to them? Now they're dead — a lot of good that did them!" Some had similar thoughts while Jesus was on the cross. "*He trusts in God; let God deliver him now if he desires him*" (Mt. 27:43). But he was vindicated by the Spirit in his resurrection and so will we. This is a good reminder to us. As much as we pray and God answers our prayers and delivers us from sickness and death, we will all be judged in the flesh and die before Jesus comes. And while it appears those who believed the gospel and died have lost, we declare by faith they are ready for the day of judgment and will be vindicated and live in the spirit the way God does (all my commentaries said this refers to the resurrection, but some believe this refers to life with God now).

This is why we preach the good news of King Jesus. One day we will all stand before the throne and give an account for what we have done in the body, whether good or bad. We preach the good news so people know to turn to the King now and repent and so be reconciled to him.

Conclusion

Are we done with sin? It is time to arm ourselves to suffer and to look like fools in this age. When we do that, we will be ready to stop carrying out the world's desires and live for God's. They'll be surprised and they'll malign us and when we die it will appear as though we lost, but as Jesus lives in and by the Spirit of God, we will too.

Stewarding God's Grace for Jesus' Eternal Glory and Dominion (1 Peter 4:7-11)

"All things praise thee, Lord most high, Heav'n and earth, and sea and sky; All were for Thy glory made, That thy greatness thus displayed; Should all worship bring to Thee; All things praise Thee — Lord may we!" All things were made for the glory of God the Father, and the aim of all history is that in the Son God would have glory and dominion over all things, and that through the Spirit his presence would fill all the earth.

So, God has made us in his royal image and told us to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it — we are to be filling the earth with God's image and multiplying beautiful, fruitful works as we would in a temple. But we have allowed evil spiritual beings to deceive us. We have filled the earth with violence perverted sexual unions and with cities built, not for the glory of God in all things, but to make a name for ourselves.

We upended the plan of God, but Scripture tells us God's purpose is steady: "*All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD*" (Num. 14:21 ESV). How will he do that? Key to that plan is setting up both himself and a human as king over all creation. **Dan. 7:14 ESV**, "*And to [the son of man] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion...*"

Knowing this great king would be a son from David's lineage, Solomon prayed: "*May [the king] have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!*" "*May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!*" "*May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel... may the whole earth be filled with his glory!*" (Psalm 72:8, 11, 17-19). Through his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus has been enthroned as king and is subduing his enemies and leading his people back to be fruitful for the glory of the Father.

Thus, consider 1 Peter 4:7-11 again with the layout I have provided. Peter is saying: "*The end of all things is at hand; therefore*" *do everything* "*in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*" to whom "*belong glory and dominion forever.*" Let's fill this out.

The End (Telos) of All Things Is At Hand (7)

The end of all things is at hand. That should be a stunning statement if we let it hit us. We are born, we go to school, we work, we get married, we have kids, we build families, businesses, governments, cities, churches. We are busy with many things, but the telos, the end, the goal of all things is at hand. Have we been living within the telos, the end for which everything was made? Have we been doing all things in the body of Christ, in school, work, family, government that Jesus' would have dominion and glory over all these things? Has our aim been the glory of God in all things through Jesus the Messiah?

The aim of the world is accomplishing personal dominion to make a name for themselves. The aim of the governments of the world is "*Nebuchadnezzar's glory*," and "*Pax Romana*," and "*Life*

liberty and happiness for all.” But the aim for which all things were made is God’s glory. The end is of all things is at hand. Are we living in God’s purposes for all things?

If you have seen people react to the news that the end is near in our world, there is something astonishingly different here. If one were to know that the end was today, in a few hours, that would call for a radically different life. Imagine the end is today — what would you do? Is there some good thing undone? Some poisonous root bearing bitter fruit that must be uprooted? If there is something radically different we would do, does that not show we have not been living as if the end is at hand? So, what ought we do?

1. Be Self-Controlled and Sober/Clear-Minded for Prayer

This is similar to 1:13. *“Being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Since the end, the goal of all things is at hand when Jesus will have glory and dominion over all things, there is a need for clear-headed focus, discipline, and control over ourselves. Do we see this is not the way of the world? The world is not self-controlled or clear-headed, sober-minded. There is a constant IV going into going into their veins anesthetizing them from pain, clouding their minds, distracting them from higher purpose: gluttony, drunkenness, greed, idolatry, lost in sexual fantasies, addicted to amusement, dings, flashes, videos, music, and urgent news.

Creation was made that we steward it for Jesus’ dominion and enjoy it with thankfulness to God’s glory. But the excess and immorality clouds everyone’s minds to the truth: the end for which all things were created is at hand.

At that reality must lead us to be sober-minded for the sake of our prayers. The imminent end should not cause us to be fatalistic or to leave behind responsibilities (Jobes 365). It leads us to be like Anna in Luke 2: camp out before God’s throne and knock day by day bringing the current darkness in our lives and in the world before him, pleading with him to guide us through the storm, begging him to redeem Jerusalem, bring his kingdom, cause his will to be done on earth as in heaven for the honoring of his name.

This is one of the problems with getting stuck in the pleasure of sin and hooking up our bodies to constant sources of amusement: the excesses cloud our minds so we don’t see clearly. We don’t see the darkness, our need, how all isn’t right, the need for God’s promises to come through, and the need for us to be disciplined in prayer because of all that.

What we do in our bodies — whether we have self-control — effects our prayers. In our commonly dualistic worldviews that split up our spirit and body, this is hard for us to grasp. We may read about fasting to pray or read 1 Corinthians 7 where married couples agree to abstain from sexual relations for a time to commit themselves to pray it may be confusing. We reason, “If I need to pray, I’ll go to my closet for 5 or 10 minutes, then I’ll eat my dinner and go to bed. Ha! Those mystic ancients didn’t get it.” But in reality it is we who struggle to understand. We need self-control and clear-headedness and the ability to take time occasionally to say “no” — not to punish ourselves or reject God’s good gifts — but to pray. To pray and align our bodies, minds, spirits to the reality that the end, the goal of all things is at hand. All things are not right and I need to speak to my Father to

ensure that the things in my power are being stewarded to the end for which they were created — God's glory. I long to be more disciplined in my camping out before God's throne — let us work on this together.

2. Love one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Love today is defined as having happy feelings and vibes about someone. But Christian love is a verb we do toward one another earnestly — we are to steadfastly pursue loving one another (Jobes 366). Peter insists this love is vital above all because earnest love will cover a multitude of sins. This does not mean we atone for our sins by loving others. It is an allusion to Proverbs 10:12, *“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.”*

So, we are living in community together for the glory of God and all will know who we are by our love and unity. But Christian community is messy. I do wrong and so do you. We sin. As we consider the reality that the end is at hand and that the Gentiles are maligning us — if we hate one another, we will cause strife every time someone sins against us. But, if we love one another, we will be able to cover a multitude of sins and allow our relationships and the community to continue to grow for God's glory.

Now, I must put an asterisk on this. Organization after organization and church after church in recent years has been plagued by scandals where very destructive sins were covered up — not in wise graciousness — but in ways that left people with little voice in the dust, without hope, help, love, or community. People have been wronged in destructive ways that weren't dealt with. And at times this explanation has been misapplied by people who are not truly repentant: love me and cover up my sin. At times, some have helped wolves put their disguises back on.

Thus, this is not an injunction to cover up sin in the camp. The church will not exist for God's glory if we do that. So let us have both wisdom and love. Love one another enough to deal with sins, but to not cause strife; love enough to forgive the repentant and cover up a multitude of sins.

3. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

If you have been a Christian community a long time, it is easy to take your support system for granted. People who come to Christ are often very vulnerable because their old communities that promote ungodly behaviors were usually very supportive. As we come out of the world and often have to cut ties with worldly communities, we are to find open doors, open arms, extra beds, and extra seats at the table in one another's homes.

Some have said in the past that hospitality is only when you open your home to complete strangers — especially giving them a place to stay. And, yes, there were not many inns in those days and that was very important in the Christian community then and still is today. Why stay at a hotel when you can be with friends and family? Independence and space can be overvalued.

But note that he says to show hospitality to *one another*. They worshipped and ate in each others homes. We are to open our homes, beds, and tables to do the same. In our quarantine and pandemic world, I don't think I can over-emphasize the importance of this today. But in our spread out 21st century cities, I must emphasize the unique challenge of our situation.

In Jesus' day, Jerusalem was 1 square mile. Ancient Rome was about 5-9 square miles. Hundreds of thousands of people lived in Rome. In Rome, Jews tried to live near one another. For all the challenges of the ancient world, imagine how easy it was to be connected to one another when literally everyone is within walking distance. Even if we don't count some outliers in our congregation, we are spread out not over 1 or 9 square miles, but roughly 800 square miles plus traffic. This is a challenge. And while I hold out hope there will be opportunities for more of us to live in closer proximity to each other, this is our situation. And it calls for us to live intentionally in hospitable community together. Virtual assembling and virtual hospitality are oxymorons — for God did not send a hologram of himself, nor did his spirit merely temporarily inhabit a man as the gnostics taught, but he lived embodied among us. So, let us open our homes and tables. Don't worry if it is perfectly clean or whether the meal is exquisite.

But let us not grumble when we do show hospitality. People who receive hospitality are always nervous they are invading someone else's space. While it is good to be considerate as a guest, we certainly don't want to undermine our hospitality with grumbling — for this would not be glorifying to God.

4. Steward God's varied grace to serve one another.

Some fake humility and say they don't have a gift, but if that's so, that means God hasn't given you grace. God's grace and gifts to us are varied and different, but each one of us should steward this grace to serve one another.

So, if we are in a role of speaking, shepherding, teaching, preaching, counseling, rebuking, encouraging — let us speak as one who speaks the oracles of God. If we are in a role where we are serving and working with our hands and feet and resources, let us do so with the strength that God supplies.

Note that we speak with God's oracles and God's strength. Why? In order that in everything God may be glorified in Jesus Christ. The goal of all history is that Jesus is given dominion and glory forever to the glory of God. Thus, in whatever we do to serve others and speak truth, we must always see ourselves as stewarding God's oracles, God's strength, God's creativity, God's love, God's grace for his glory. God is glorified when we use, grow, and give to others what he has given us.

To give examples, when we speak, we ought not speak with the wisdom of Oprah's chicken soup for the soul; rather, we should meditate on Scripture day and night, let that transform our imagination and intellect, and speak to others as one who speaks God's oracles. When we serve and love, we ought not try to emulate Ghandi. When we hold positions of leadership, our primary aim is not to lead as Washington, Bush, Obama, Trump, or Biden would (though we may learn something from them). When we give we do not give as Tim Cook or Bill Gates would. Why? We don't want Oprah, Ghandi, Washington, Biden, or Bill Gates to have glory and dominion forever — we want King Jesus to have that. We don't want them to have the glory, we want God to have the glory. So we speak and serve with his uncorrupted word and his enduring strength.

This is why it is not enough for you or me to get up here to *merely* teach spirituality that makes us somewhat nice people. This is why we shouldn't give leftovers. This is why it's not okay to go to

school *only* to get good grades or to start a business to get rich or to work on a project to become famous or to counsel others to *merely* make them happy or to be a friend to *simply* cure loneliness. This is why the aim of a Christian is not to *merely* run a nice empire for Nebuchadnezzar's glory, for Pax Romana, or for life, liberty, and happiness. We are to do all things to the end that Jesus would have dominion over all things. We are to do all things to the end that God would be glorified and honored by how every molecule, person, relationship, church, business, government, and ruler honors him.

To God belongs glory in Jesus Christ. And to Jesus Christ belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen, may it be so. This end where all things have been put under Jesus' feet and where God is glorified in all things — this end is at hand. Let us be clear-headed for our prayers, earnestly loving one another, hospitable, stewarding every gift of God for his glory — hastening the end for which all things were made.

When by God's Will You Suffer (1 Peter 4:12-19)

For thousands of years, God's people have suffered in various states of exile and return — away from the garden, away from the promised land, away from God's presence, and away from God's people and alone among people who do not know God. Peter has been grabbing onto that reality of our foreignness among people here to quantify what these Christians and what we today may suffer. He has not let up on that theme — the steady drumbeat has been about our exclusion from larger society and our suffering because of it. Our text today is no different, but it is significant because he states something clearer than ever before: when we suffer, it is God's will that we are suffering (vs. 19). Suffering is purposeful and necessary in God's eyes. God, for your good, wants and wills suffering for you and me. This comes out at the end of the text, but it comes up before it. Verse 12: Peter says the fiery trial is to *test you*. Verse 17: Peter says persecution is actually the beginning of God's end times judgment, and it is God's judgment on us! There's some challenging things here, but the overriding concept is that God intends for those in Christ to suffer. How ought we to think about that? How ought we to respond?

Before we dive right in, I want to let you behind the pulpit for a moment to wrestle with something I'm wrestling with. Suffering in this text is very clearly persecution: *you share in Christ's sufferings (13); you are insulted for the name of Christ (14); if anyone suffers as a Christian (16)*. Other texts, like Romans 5 and James 1, however, speak about suffering in general. I don't want to diminish that the persecution, exclusion, insults, foreignness, and loneliness we experience because of we serve Christ is what we should experience and what this text is about. I want to be clear that while *this* text speaks about persecution, there is absolutely overlap in the concepts — I believe all suffering tests us and can be God's judgment to purify us. But, I think we all recognize that suffering takes on a new meaning when we live in Babylon and lack no food or medicine and all manner of fine things are imported for us. That doesn't mean we don't suffer, but it also means that in our softness, the slightest discomfort or inconvenience or lack of sovereign control over our lives can be incorrectly called "suffering." I have a lot of thoughts about that I'm trying to work through, but I simply submit what I'm wrestling with to you for you to chew on as well. All that aside, back to the question: God intends for us to suffer for Christ's name, but how ought we to respond to that?

Don't Be Surprised; Rejoice As You Share Christ's Sufferings (vs. 12-14)

Allow me to set the context to our modern situation before commenting on this text. We have had more religious freedoms in the U.S. than anyone has ever had — even when the church was at the helm in the West. This has very sadly led to the rise of hundreds and even thousands of different churches and religious movements which have splintered both Christians and their teaching. Virtually anyone has been able to stand up with a Bible and a Greek Lexicon and start a church anywhere and teach virtually anything with no consequences. Some good has resulted from that — no governing authorities have cared what you taught. But the problem is that this is because we have lived in a society where *no one* cares what *anyone* teaches about anything — even sometimes the people in the churches — it's all acceptable!

Things are starting to shift though outside the church. They are starting to realize the truth that it does matter what people believe and what people teach. We've seen that in the last year with a

host of issues. Suddenly, people realize now that what you believe about covid-19, George Floyd, the election, climate change, vaccines, gender, sexuality — it all matters. Whatever truths exist about these things matter — and it is actually terribly difficult to know what is true. But massive economic, political, and societal shifts have happened with long lasting personal and societal repercussions precisely because of what people do or do not believe about any of these things.

All that said, now people suddenly do care what you believe because they realize that what you believe is a claim about truth and we realize now that this affects reality. That leads to a tremendous opportunity for us if we can seize it. We need to promote respectful discourse about, but we don't want to be the people who suddenly say, "Hey, who cares, it doesn't matter what you believe." Here's why. In the past, talk about Jesus has been relegated to the talk of private religious interpretation: whatever you believe about Jesus doesn't matter in the public sphere. But we all know: whether God raised Jesus from the dead is not a matter of private interpretation but of public truth. And if it is true, it changes everything — certainly a lot more than the truth about the election or something else. And, while being respectful, we want to lean into that, not avoid it. When the good news of Jesus' ascendancy to kingship was foretold in the OT, the prophets said it would literally cause kings and rulers to bow the knee and change how they rule and what they rule for. Jesus was killed in a real body in the real world and that body was raised imperishable in the real world and that is a publicly defensible fact — gospel — we are calling people to shape their lives around. It matters. It has always mattered and people in the past always knew this, but that impact has been lost for sometime.

So, when we do lovingly and boldly proclaim to have the corner on the objective truth about this reality and people start to care about it and some get angry about it and we start enduring fiery trials over this, Peter says in verse 12 that we shouldn't be surprised as if some strange thing were happening to us. Fiery trials are expected and normal in this age. In fact, Peter says God wills it and that it is to test us.

God wills that we would suffer so that we would be tested. Despite the fact that we may *feel* faithful and *believe* that we are faithful, we need to be tested. Richard Wumbrand is a Christian who suffered much at the hands of the Soviets in Russia. He also watched many other Christians suffer — some suffered faithfully, others defected. He writes this: "There are two kinds of Christians: those who sincerely believe in God and those who, just as sincerely, believe that they believe. You can tell them apart by their actions in decisive moments." Abraham said he believed God and even believed he did in his heart, but God himself who knows all hearts did not say that he knew Abraham trusted him until after he tested him. In the same way, we proclaim Jesus is king and that we trust him and that we'll suffer with him and hope in the revelation of his glory, but the fiery trial tests us — to show God, the heavenly host, and we ourselves the truth and to help us grow. So, fiery trials aren't some strange unexpected thing: it is literally what we signed up for.

Instead of being surprised, we should rejoice because we are sharing in Christ's sufferings. *God wills that we suffer so we can share in Christ's sufferings.* In fact, we must rejoice. Note in **verse 13** that there is a direct correlation: we rejoice in his sufferings so we may rejoice when his glory is revealed. The common tradition throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament has always been that the Christ had to suffer before being exalted to reign as a glorious king. It's just a rule: the cross leads to the crown, and suffering leads to glory. And if that is true for him, it's true

for us. If we want to share in his glory then and rejoice when his glory is revealed before all, we have to rejoice in our sharing of the sufferings that lead to the glory. Whenever someone we love is going through difficult times, we often express that we wish we could feel what they feel. When we suffer for Christ's name, in some way we are mystically getting to share in the sufferings of Christ, and if we'll rejoice in that, we will get to share in and rejoice in the glory that results from the sufferings. *God wills that we suffer so we can share in Christ's glory.*

In fact, even now, Peter wants us to see that if we suffer for Christ's name, this is an affirmation that the glory to be revealed in the end and the Spirit of God actually rest on us now. Peter is echoing Isaiah 11 here. Isaiah said that the Spirit of God would rest on the coming king, but Peter is saying that our suffering for Christ's name shows that is a present reality for us! To put it very clearly: if we are insulted for the name of Christ, we must have the same Spirit of God that is on him. Why would they insult us for his name if we didn't have the same Spirit resting upon us?

All that said, the clear teaching here is that suffering fiery trials for the name of Christ should lead us to rejoice because of all this good that comes from it: we are being tested, we are sharing in Christ's sufferings that we may rejoice in his glory, we are confirmed to have the Spirit of glory and of God resting on us. Rejoicing over suffering is completely antithetical to how we naturally think, so we have to change our mindset. I like what I heard that Samuel Rutherford said: the great King keeps his wine in the cellars of affliction. Also, what Charles Spurgeon said: they who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls. No one ever says they experience the most growth and refinement in a season of great ease and comfort! (credit: John Piper) We want the wine of the great king and we want rare pearls. We want to be tested, we want to know the Spirit of God and of the glory of the age to come is on us now, we want rejoice over the revelation of Jesus' glory when he comes. But can we have wine without going to the cellar? Pearls without diving to the depths of the sea? Neither can we have nor rejoice in glory without sharing the sufferings of Christ. The apostles knew this, for when they were beaten and charged not to speak, they left "*rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name*" (Acts 5:41). Thus, let us welcome the fiery trial with rejoicing over the testing it accomplishes and the glory it leads to!

Don't Suffer As an Evildoer, but As a Christian (vs. 15-16)

Peter warns, however, that we shouldn't suffer for doing wrong. Christ was *falsely* accused and we will be *falsely* accused. But if we steal or even simply meddle in other people's business and suffer for it, let's not attribute any of that to Christ. In fact, let's just not do those things or suffer for those causes. Someone came to me one time complaining about their suffering, "Why God? Why?" But they were living in rebellion against God. Let's not make our suffering out to be righteous if it isn't.

But the flip side of that is verse 16: when we do suffer as a Christian, Peter wants us to make sure we aren't ashamed but rather we glorify God with that name. One person proudly says they are suffering for Christ while suffering for doing evil, but another may actually suffer dishonor for being a Christian and feel ashamed of that. Did you know that most scholars actually think that the name Christian was not a term Christians came up with, but was something they were actually called by others? It was likely coined by people who were disparaging them and putting them in a box as Christ-followers. But Peter says we ought to own it — they call us Christians and

they put us in that box, they say “Oh Christians believe this and do that,” — don’t be ashamed, don’t change your beliefs, don’t change your walk, don’t try to distance yourself from other Christians (“I am not like those puritanical, blah blah”) — own it. Glorify God in that name. Rejoice and share the sufferings of Christ that you may rejoice when his glory is revealed!

Judgment Begins with Us, What Will Become of Sinners? (vs. 17-19)

Here in verses 17-19 Peter zooms out and helps us see where we are at in the history of reality. And, in short, here’s the reality he paints: we may often put the Day of Judgment to some far off point in time and say that it’s the time when all the sinners will be judged, but Peter is very clear that persecution is God’s end times judgment on us — the house of God — right now. The Day of Judgment has begun, and it begins with us.

This has always been the case throughout history that, before God judged the outside world, judgment began at his house. In the book of Samuel when the wicked Philistines, Amorites, and Amalekites were living in wickedness and idolatry, God didn’t judge any of them first — if you remember he brought judgment upon corrupted the house of God and people of God that were residing in Shiloh. When Ezekiel saw the vision of the executioner coming to Jerusalem to slay the wicked, the executioner was clearly told: begin at my sanctuary.

In fact, this flow is foretold in **Malachi 3:1-5**. Turn there. Note the flow: God will go to his temple first and he refines the people like gold and silver first, but then he comes against the wicked that remain afterwards. When we are persecuted this is like the Day of Judgment coming against us now. Why? Notice in Malachi that it is to refine and purify the people. This is what Peter said in chapter 1: we are grieved by various trials so that our faith may be tested by fire. God says the same through Zechariah: he will put his people into the fire to refine them (Zech. 13:9). The reality is that even God’s house is not yet pure. Leviticus demonstrates this: every year the tabernacle was cleansed of all the defilement the people brought on it. We aren’t as wicked as the world, but we are coming out of the world and we still have stains on us and God will not accept us a little purer or even a lot purer than the world: we are aiming for the perfection of Jesus Christ. No imperfect sinner will inherit glory, only sinners who have now been perfected. And the fires of trials do that.

Paul echoes the same theme when reminding the Corinthians that God was making sick and even killing some of them. **1 Cor. 11:32 ESV**, *“But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”* Brothers and sisters, we need God’s judgment and discipline — we need persecution and sufferings of various kinds — because we need to be refined so we aren’t condemned with the world.

Peter leaves us with a both fearful thought and a warming encouragement. God starts judgment with us, and he even sees the need to further refine people who are already righteous, what will become of sinners? Sit on that question.

But for us, he offers an encouragement in verse 19: you are suffering according to God’s will, so entrust your soul to your Creator and keep doing good. We need to reclaim a serious and immediate vision of God’s judgment. We need to talk about it. See it. Not be afraid to say, “This is God’s judgment and I know God’s purposes for judgment.” Let us not strip suffering of purpose or

act as if it doesn't matter — no, God is drawing near to his house in these times to refine us. Let us anticipate this and rejoice in it and receive it for our good and for God's glory.

Shepherding the Flock (1 Peter 5:1-5)

Judgment is beginning now at God's house, so, in our text, Peter exhorts the *elders* who are over God's house.

Let's set the stage for Peter by rewinding to another time when judgment began at God's house. It was 591 BC and Ezekiel was sitting in his home in exile outside of Babylon. The elders of Judah had come to hear a word from the Lord. The exiles had been away from home for six years and felt this whole thing was an injustice that would end soon. Their fathers were responsible, not them. Soon, they would go home — exile will have been a bad dream... but Ezekiel's theatrics caught their attention, so they went to listen to him anyway.

As the elders sat in his presence, Ezekiel was brought in a vision to the temple in Jerusalem — the place they longed to return to and to see. In his vision, Ezekiel saw *ugliness* — the temple was defiled with all manner of idolatry. So, six executioners were brought near and told to strike down everyone in Jerusalem who was not marked by God. But, before they begin, they are told, "*Begin at my sanctuary.*" And then Ezekiel tells us the executioners "*began with the elders who were before the house.*" In Ezekiel judgment is falling upon the nations, upon Judah, and Jerusalem. But God's judgment, Peter later warns us in Ezekiel-like words, began and begins "*at the house of God.*" There's may be good reason Peter now says, "*So, I exhort the elders among you...*" Judgment begins at God's house before it begins with the nations, but it specifically begins with the elders over God's house.

Christ's glory will be revealed and the righteous are barely saved to partake in that. So, among all people, we have actually signed up to suffer first to be tested and refined so we can be proved — like gold — to be genuine before that final day. We are living stones being built as God's house — but we are not yet the temple we should be. So God wills that we endure judgement, suffering, and refinement now. Therefore, we desperately need elders to shepherd the flock.

In our text, Peter first exhorts the elders before speaking to the rest of us — especially those of us who are younger. Therefore, for the first half of our sermon, I'm speaking to our elders — but my prayer is this: God, give other men in our church a heart for God's people. Give other men the desire, ability, love, and knowledge to shepherd this flock. So I am also speaking to those of you who I hope will prepare to take up their cloaks — in 5, 10, 20, or 30 years.

Shepherding the Flock (5:1-4)

Peter offers four exhortations and one goal to look forward to.

First, *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight*. Elders and future ones, you must understand that we are like sheep. We don't know where green pastures and still waters are. We need to be led and fed and protected. On our own, we don't feed on the most nutritious pastures. Further, some fat sheep and wolves who want to bully and take advantage of us are hoping you'll step away, look the other way; but those who are true sheep feel anxious if you aren't present to carefully guide, feed and protect us. We might foolishly resist you at times, but we are

blessed to have you as elders. Please don't stop exercising oversight and shepherding us. And, do *shepherd* — there is other work to be done in the church and life that we beg you let others do.

Note that he says to shepherd the flock of *God*. While you must take a measure of responsibility for us, some elders — pastors — become possessive: this is *my* flock to guide as I see fit. This is God's flock.

And he says to shepherd the flock of God *that is among you*. I don't believe Peter says this as to discourage concern for the larger flock of God: Peter is an elder who is serving that need by writing this letter and that concern should not die with the apostles. However, do shepherd *this* flock of God. At some point, you must focus on the sheep where God has placed you. Don't lose sight of us... trying to take upon yourself the responsibility for the whole flock of God everywhere or even wondering about more compliant sheep elsewhere. Moses was not able carry the title "Chief Shepherd" and you won't be able to either — thank God for Jesus.

Second, ***exercise oversight willingly, not under compulsion***. I appreciated John's encouragement to us last week to find joy in whatever we do and to not do a work if we cannot take joy in it. Elders, if you only serve because you feel you have to, you will run out of steam, you won't model joy, and it would have been better that you not serve. I have seen occasions where people in various positions were not willing to serve any more, but they held onto the role. In these situations, work stagnates and people become discouraged — including people who might be pleased to relieve them of their duties. Find it in yourself to do this work willingly — and if not, actively seek to pass off your staff and cloak to someone else.

Third, related, ***not for shameful gain, but eagerly***. While John and I receive pay from you as evangelists, our three elders have decided to serve us without pay. We joked during the pandemic that we should pay the elders double since the burden during the pandemic was much heavier. John even suggested we pay them triple. In all seriousness, our elders do not receive pay, but, to my knowledge, that has always been the historical norm. And I hope and trust it will be our honor to rise to the occasion to pay our elders if we and they desire to do that. I don't care much that doctors exist until me or my family are terribly sick, and then we are all thankful doctors have put in tremendous time to wisely prepare to walk with us through difficulty. But they had to go through a lot of schooling and training to be ready for that. I think pastoring and preparing to do that may have some parallels. Some may show their eagerness to shepherd the flock by preparing diligently in schooling and training by giving themselves fully to the work of an elder. May we be ready to shoulder that for our own good.

But how many pastors have been caught up in financial scandals — *shameful* gain! How many even simply shepherd or preach simply because they are in the market for a job to put food on the table. Church, I caution you to never bring on someone who is merely looking for a job. As in the days of Micah, they may preach "peace" to those who fill their stomachs, but declare war against those who do not. Elders, other jobs you might simply be happy if you are paid, but this must be a work you are eager to do regardless.

Fourth, ***not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock***. This is the same word Jesus used when he said that the rulers of the Gentiles *lord it over*. Some people revel in calling the shots. Parents, you know the desire that can come up in us to micromanage our

children — we aren't looking for that. Jesus is not looking for leaders riding chariots to whip us from behind and call out orders, he is looking for leaders who will walk with and in front of us to *show us* by example how to be. And furthermore, not domineering also means it is best to avoid getting your fingers in everything. We need shepherding, but, take heart, you don't have to give your input on everything, and people don't want your input on everything.

Not domineering also means we don't need elders to rule as CEOs, but again as examples. And I would offer this caution — you may certainly learn a lot about leadership from the business world, but we need to be careful about translating that to the church. Some things may be applicable and helpful, but people, money, and time all work differently here. Our goals are different, our way of doing things is very different. There may be a lot of things you did in a corporation in dealing with employees that simply don't work as you lead the church. Remember that the testing ground for the office of an elder is the home. As you take steps, lead, make decisions, deal with conflict, interact with other leaders — ask yourself, “Would this work in the home? Would I do this as a father leading my family?” If not, chances are it will be poorly received in the church too.

Peter offers a goal for you to look at, elders: ***when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*** Those who won contests in their day received leafy crowns that would quickly fade and wilt. It's easy to get caught up wondering if our work will be recognized by anyone in this age. Whatever recognition we receive in this age will fade. But, elders, you have a Chief Shepherd who is watching and hoping to reward you with an *unfading* crown of glory, recognition and reward for your work that will never fade.

This reminds me of Luke 12 when Jesus encourages us that while he is gone, the master will appoint chief servants to ensure the other servants are cared for. **Luke 12:43–44 ESV**, “*Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.*” I cannot fathom all that awaits us at the Lord's return — but consider that if you serve well as elders, when he returns, truly, he will set you over much.

Note by the way that both Peter and Jesus here have their sights set not on some reward at death but on the return, the appearance of Jesus. I know it is challenging because so many of our songs focus on a reward at the end of our personal lives. And in a couple of places Scriptures do speak of the rest we will have when we die — thank God for that! But 99% of Scripture urges us to not to look at our individual graves but to our collective hope in the clouds at the end of all history.

Be Subject to the Elders; Clothe Yourselves with Humility (5:5)

Now, Peter turns to the rest of us in verse 5 with a special word towards those of us who are younger. I remember when I first came here Troxel explained that previous generations were characterized by a spirit of joining something larger than themselves and committing to it to the bitter end. They followed their fearless leaders to the death — *sometimes* turning a blind eye to skeletons in the closet. It's hard for me to emphasize how different our generation is. Our age is now characterized by individualism. I am willing to follow as long as you help me feel comfortable in my own skin and as long as your polite requests are crafted around my personal goals and schedules. And if you ever say anything I disagree with that makes me feel

uncomfortable, you have not made me feel safe, and I will leave. Church, if you are fully imbedded within the spirit of this age as much as I have been, we will say together: I should be committed to the group and the leaders as long as it is best for me — *and we won't see what is wrong with that.*

The spirit of our age has led to a widespread loss: it is very difficult for leaders of any group to carry authority or weight to lead anywhere. Sometimes this reaction is very understandable — leaders are not always trustworthy. But, see, our definition of untrustworthy includes this large, made-up category called: *they have my best interests at heart.* That's a difficult thing to judge, and that shouldn't be at the top of our list.

This often leads to a cafeteria-style way of following the elders. I'll pick what I want and leave what I don't. But we don't always put the best things on our plate when we visit buffets.

This will now be a challenge for anyone in our world, old or young — individualism is part of the air we breath. Someone will be committed to something for years, but if I judge that *my best interests aren't your number one concern*, I'll cancel you.

But this can especially be a challenge for those of us who are young. This is why you see so many hip churches popping up in the past couple of decades started by young people for young people. They're tired of the stiff ways of the older generation. But, those of us who are younger need to consider: what will it be like when we are older? When we wish the younger generation would bend their ears? We know. If we don't model that humility and 100% commitment to the church and her elders even when it is hard, neither will our children be committed and subject to the church, the elders, or even to us when we are older. If we insist our tired leaders make church fit our needs, our kids will insist that of us when we are older.

This doesn't mean elders are always right. It doesn't mean there is not a time for us to exhort them. We all fall short in various ways and we all need encouragement.

This also doesn't mean Peter is calling for mindless obedience. If this sounds like that to you, Satan is nearer to you than you think. Elders are in fact hoping for you to come fully awake and alert with your will and desires and creativity and passion for God's glory fully intact. I just love it when when God puts it on someone's heart to serve Jesus and his church in ways none of us considered.

None of this is a call to blindly follow, this is a call for us to be alert to our tendency to arrogant. Our tendency to think we know it all or that we don't need shepherding. This is a call to humility. Peter is roughly quoting Proverbs 3:34, *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.* Normally we consider this in relation to God — I need to be humble towards God and not proud towards God. And this is good. But Peter urges this in the context of the church — all of us need to clothe ourselves with humility in our interactions with *one another.* God will give grace to those who are humble towards *others.* There will always be friction here and there in the church — iron sharpens iron. If there's no friction we probably aren't trying very hard. But, I like how one author put it: "Humility is the oil that allows relationships in the church to run smoothly and lovingly." (Schreiner 238)

Conclusion

Judgment begins now with God's house. We have signed up to suffer in this age. We need wise, eager elders to shepherd us through the valley of the shadow of death. We need to follow our elders where they guide us. They have been there before.

God's Mighty Hand and the Devil's Restless Hunt (1 Peter 5:6-14)

For two years we have been studying 1 Peter off and on being reminded that we are foreigners suffering in exile for a little while, awaiting the eternal day of glory and exaltation. Now, as Peter wraps up his letter, we ask: how should we think and live until God exalts us in due time?

First, Humble Yourselves So That God May Exalt You (5:6-7)

We are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. God is God and he will do what he sees fit with our lives and we don't get to argue. Think about the gravity of what that meant for these Christians. They live as exiles grieved by various trials that feel like fire; sinful passions wage war against their souls; foolish people around them slander their good behavior, twist their words, and falsely accuse them of evil; a good number of them are slaves — some of them with evil masters who beat and curse them. Humbling themselves under God's mighty hand — accepting his will — *was a big ask. But, if they did humble themselves in this way while enduring suffering like this, I think that would have rightly led them to have little expectations of what is normally considered a good life.* They had to accept losing their lives in this age as they lived *humbly under God's mighty hand.*

This is a hard learned lesson when suffering *feels* optional. In the modern West we are used to exerting a lot of control over our environment. Run out of supplies? *Click.* Can't find a loved one? *Location tracking.* Vandals haunting your neighborhood at night? *Install security cameras and call the police.* Pandemic? *Hundreds of millions of dollars later — vaccine.* Dirty floors? *Hey Siri/Alexa, turn on the vacuum.* Suffering? *Hey, God? ... Never-mind. Amazon trucks are more reliable.*

Catholic Philosopher Charles Taylor has demonstrated that 500 years ago people in the west viewed the world as an enchanted place open to both God's and Satan's power — full of angels and demons. Each dark night in their homes, each winter with the cold, each season with their crops, each sickness, each pregnancy, each trip into the deep woods: they held their breath and begged God to be with them and to send his angels to guard them. Then they went about their lives always aware that some demon from Hell might block their path or that some angel from God might guard them, bring timely rains, good health, or protect them from the dangers of each night. They saw heaven and hell as open places that are close to our world and impact our lives every day. And you were considered an absolute fool if you thought you could determine your destiny apart from God — it was considered very reasonable to humble yourself under the mighty hand of Yahweh and cast your anxieties on him. Or, in Peter's world, at least call out to some god. You would almost never deny the existence of divine transcendent powers.

But for many reasons, we live in a different world now: our take is that we don't live in an enchanted cosmos full of all manner of spiritual beings we cannot see nor explain, we live in a cold universe that we weigh, measure, test, and explain by means of pure rationalism. We know exactly what caused us to get sick and how to be healed. We know what's happening in the clouds when rain happens and we can see it coming on our radars. We know how to ensure we have crops without ever saying a prayer. We view people in the past as uneducated, superstitious fools. We know how things happen and we can figure out how to manipulate it to our advantage, and that's

all you need to know right? Never-mind *why* we get sick; never-mind *who* sends the rains; never-mind that we can cut a corpse open and identify every part yet we live with a constant undercurrent of anxiety and uncertainty because we have no clue *who we are or why we are*. We can measure, weigh, track, and explain what things are made of, but what's their significance?

We are products of our age. Our knowledge, technology, and cultural beliefs transform how we interact with our world (and even how we read the Scriptures). It gives us a sense of control. *But what about when our body and world doesn't all work to our benefit? What about when we cannot control it? What about when the rains don't come, or when they don't stop? What about when the surgery goes wrong? What about when the virus doesn't go away? We may just find ourselves doing and rationalizing anything to make it go away — because we can't just live under God's mighty hand and cast all our anxieties on him and accept a lack of control, can we?*

Every once in a while I have to remind myself that God may be allowing our towers of technology to hold at bay a ton of the chaos of the fallen world, but he doesn't have to keep allowing that. He can confuse our languages. I'd like to try to forget that, but every once in awhile when I look at Ashley and Ruth I remember that without medical technologies none of them would likely be alive and Judith would likely not make it past 1 or 2 years old. We'd like to forget our control over the world is a mirage, but every time one of us has to take antibiotics or be put under the knife its like the morphine high just wore off and we're reminded this life is pain and chaos and we may not always be able to keep that at bay with a pill or a tap.

This world is a dark and cold place haunted by hell and its demons, but Jesus and heaven's kingdom have invaded this world and brought a little light, cast out a few demons, and rolled back the stone — demonstrating that heaven's day is coming. But we must still suffer many tribulations to enter the kingdom. Sickness, genetic defects, infertility, miscarriages, cancer, accidents, early deaths, famines, pandemics, slander, false accusations, loss of face and job for the sake of Jesus should all be considered standard fare. *Therefore*, as Peter says, we need to *humble* ourselves under God's mighty hand. To do that, we have to throw off our delusions of control. Our world is not shut off from the dark whims of Satan nor of the often unknowable will of our wise heavenly Father. A war rages in the heavenly places — which touches us in ways we cannot readily see. But God's mighty hand will guide us and history where he sees fit. At the proper time he will exalt us — the powers of darkness under our feet — but we must humble ourselves.

Humility here looks like casting all our anxieties on God. Why? *God cares for you*. But do we see how strange this is to us? These Christians had to grapple with a world where they confess Jesus as Lord of history, and the emperor burns your friends on poles to light his gardens; a world where God cares for you and at the same time your master unjustly beats you — all while you cast your anxieties on God. May our blessings not blur our vision. May we always step back with believers across all history and recognize we really are not in control and keep casting our anxieties on the God who does indeed cares for us — humbly accepting what his sovereign hand gives.

Second, Be Sober-minded and Watchful for the Devil (5:8-9)

Yet again, this is tough in a disenchanting age where the devil is a red cartoon character. We sound superstitious to blame suffering and temptation on him — let alone say he is prowling around like

a lion seeking someone to devour. But in ages past people intuitively knew their cosmos was inhabited by all sorts of spiritual powers. They knew their minds, bodies, and lives were open and vulnerable to not only the Holy Spirit, but also to demonic spirits. But we intuitively see ourselves as closed off — inaccessible to spiritual powers that cannot be rationally explained away. That leaves us very vulnerable. And we must remember, when he does come, it's not always as a terrifying dragon. He and his servants are often dressed up as angels of light and sound like innocent lambs. And he's tricky: often compromising us by trying to make us decide between two corrupt paths — take the road less wicked.

Let's not be naive. *He is a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We are always being hunted.* I'm sure you have watched those animal shows where the predators are sneaking around their prey in the tall grass, waiting for them to turn their backs. I always love watching the meerkats — they always have sentries out to watch. But my reaction at their different behaviors is a curious thing. When I see lions tracking the wildebeests I think, "Look up!!" And yet, when I see meerkats on sentry duty I want to say, "Take it easy, guys!"

Let's talk about the devil and our kids for a moment. Research varies, but over the past two decades statistics show that roughly 65-90% of youth will leave the church after high school. Some do come back later, but any number in that general range is staggering. From what I gather, only roughly 10% outright deny the faith. Most simply say they are busy or disillusioned with the church. *It's that simple. When our kids hit their 20s and life gets busy or hard or when they perceive hypocrisy, the devil snatches away the majority of our kids. Are we raising our kids until then as if we are in an all out war with the devil for their souls? Or are we trying to secure their best life now?*

Maybe all the homework, practices, and extracurriculars will pay off and one of our youngsters will cure cancer, play for the Astros or Rockets, or become CEO of the next great company. But they intuitively know when all these things bow the knee to serve Jesus and his people, and when they bow the knee to serve their happiness and unique needs. *When we are willing to miss bible study, prayer time, the assembly, service, or fellowship opportunities for sleep, sports, chores, homework, or work, we have just cut off at the feet our words which say Yahweh is God and we are in a war with the devil.* Our hearts and words might say one thing is important; but they will believe our bodies more. They intuit the truth from our habits. We are what we love, but what we love is not merely what we think — it is what we habitually do (*You Are What You Love*, Smith).

But the devil is hunting and Peter says we need to resist him *"knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."* One way we defend ourselves against the devil is through solidarity of believers together resisting him. A few of us were talking recently and we found that all of us were going through a rocky time with our faith. We knew our circumstances were tough, but we didn't know that each other felt like we were barely hanging on. It was quite encouraging to know that. Misery loves its company — a bunch of wildebeests together as a herd *running* for their lives.

We're all enduring suffering at the hands of the devil. We're all tempted week by week to explode in anger, pursue security in our money, let busyness or tiredness lead us to neglect our assemblies, studies, prayers, and habits to live out and proclaim the truth; he tempts us to join fruitless conversations and activities with the crowd; to anesthetize our boredom, anxiety, or loneliness

with pornography, alcohol, and drugs; to believe the stories and hopes of modern ideologies: pursue equality, sexual freedom, life, liberty, and happiness, and the triumph of the U.S.; or in the face of health challenges, marital strife, and financial stress, he tempts us to stop caring, stop fighting, and give up altogether. All across the world, *we're all in this fight together*.

By the way, one way for us to truly feel altogether in this is not only to talk together about what we're going through, but to sing and pray it together. And that can be challenging — so many of the songs in our songbooks are peppy and shallow — very unlike the tenor of the Psalms. There's a time to rejoice deeply in song, and there's a time to weep deeply in song. But the songs currently at our disposal give us limited options for that. After we got home from the hospital and the shell shock of everything with Judith's heart problems, all Willa wanted to sing was Victory in Jesus. I really needed to *sing*, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I'm not sure what number that one is in the song book.

But we won't be anxiously hunted forever — note **verses 10-11**.

Little Suffering, Eternal Glory (5:10-11)

It feels like we are being blown about in an eternal stormy night. But, actually, our suffering is just for a *little while* and God will call us to *eternal* glory. We have been weak, tired, doubtful, afflicted, tempted, distracted, tossed about; but in that day God himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. God will have dominion forever and ever, no more weeds to pull or enemies to threaten.

Proverbs 14:13 (ESV) says, "*Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.*" Have you ever felt that way? Even when you laugh you can't enjoy it. Can you imagine a day when we'll be able to smile and laugh freely? **Psalms 126:1-3 (ESV)** helps us imagine. It is a song about coming home from exile. "*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.*"

One day the fortunes of God's people will never be reversed. We'll laugh and shout for joy, and our hearts won't ache, because everything sad will become untrue. We'll come home to Zion and share in eternal glory in Christ. *We'll keep rubbing our eyes because it will feel like a dream.*

Until then, let us humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, cast our anxieties on him, be watchful for the devil, and — verse 14 — *Greet one another with the kiss of love*. You can walk all the way to the fires of Mordor if a faithful friends go with you. May our affectionate, familial love for one another last us through to that day.