

## **This Exiled Life – part 1**

Welcome to the Exile: Introducing 1 Peter

1 Peter 1:1-2

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*<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 1 Peter 1:1–2 (ESV)*

This summer our family embarked on a camping trip to the Smoky Mountains. We determined that we wanted to experience the mountains of Tennessee with the same level of intensity that we experienced Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons a few years earlier, so we booked a campsite deep in the national park. However, we got more than we bargained for or expected.

The first alarming sight was the presence of a bear trap immediately adjacent to our campsite. It wasn't set or filled with bait, but nonetheless it was ... right ... there. Secondly, there was no electricity or showers in the campground. Now we had dealt with this during other camping experiences, but not when days were so humid, the river was so incredibly cold, and legitimate showers were twenty-five minutes away. Finally, we quickly learned why the campground was so lush and green. During the month of July, the climate of the Smoky Mountains resembles that of a rainforest. It rains, really hard, nearly every day, especially at night.

Our Smoky Mountain trip lasted about five days. We had a great time being together as a family, but the living conditions were much more challenging than what I anticipated. In fact, there were a few times when I had this thought: "This trip is a lot more challenging and uncomfortable than I had imagined." You see, I had warned everyone in advance about the nature of a camping experience. I told them about the lack of facilities, and how we would have to adjust. And my family was very flexible and had good attitudes about bathing in the river, no cell coverage, and less than dry beds. But it wasn't easy. Looking back, I would tell you that I thought I was ready for what we were going to experience, but the reality was more challenging and more disorienting than what I imagined. The romantic idealism of camping in the Smokies was great. But the reality pressed me a bit more than what I anticipated. So next time, we'll probably get a cabin ... or bring a generator.

### **The Normative Stranger**

Over the last few years I've noticed a similar emotional reaction inside of me and others when it comes to what it means to be a Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. For most of our lives we would read the Bible and hear statements about being "strangers" or "aliens" as followers of Jesus, and those terms had a romantic idealism connected to them. For most of us being an "alien" meant that you went to church while others slept in, you shared the gospel and the Five Spiritual Laws with people who may or not believe what you believed, you didn't swear when others did, and you were careful to not go to the wrong kind of movies. Being a Christian meant being different, but not

too different. There was some kind of normative national ethic in which Biblical Christianity fit pretty well. The United States felt, at some level, as “one nation under God.”

But that sense is gone, and what has replaced it is a new cultural norm that has made incognito, comfortable, and cultural Christianity a shrinking island. In other words, believing that the Bible is authoritative, that ethical standards, especially sexual ethics, are determined outside of ourselves, and that salvation is offered exclusively through Jesus is increasingly causing conflict, putting relationships and jobs at risk, and pushing committed Christians to the margins of society.

Biblically minded Christians now hear the word “exile” differently. We are discovering that you can become an exile in your own family, your long-standing career, in your neighborhood, and the society at large. Writing in 2014, Carl Trueman, Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, says the following:

*We live in a time of exile. At least those of us do who hold to traditional Christian beliefs... The Western public square is no longer a place where Christians feel they belong with any degree of comfort. For Christians in the United States, this is particularly disorienting. In Europe, Christianity was pushed to the margins over a couple of centuries—the tide of faith retreated {slowly}. In America, the process seems to be happening much more rapidly.<sup>1</sup>*

I know that you feel this, and it has been my aim this year to try and help us get our heads and hearts around this changing reality. Over the last year we’ve embarked on some intentional sermon series to work through this new normal:

- We studied Lamentations in order to learn about the appropriate and helpful category of lament so that we would know how to sing in a minor key and tune our hearts in uncomfortable circumstances. We learned that to cry is human and to lament is Christian
- Then we talked about heaven so that we could reset our affections toward where our true citizenship lies.
- We looked at the life of Daniel to see an example of someone who figured out how to honor God while living in a foreign land.
- We examined the believability of the Bible and why it should be trusted as authoritative.

All of these series were designed to help us not only think differently about the cultural challenges that we are facing but also to set us up for the study of the book of 1 Peter, which I think is the most helpful and clearest book in the New Testament about how to live in a culture that has begun to turn against you.

So we studied Lamentations, Heaven, Daniel, and The Bible in order to get to 1 Peter.

### **Why This Series?**

From this Sunday through June of next year, we are going to be diving deep and walking slowly through the book of 1 Peter. We’ll take some time off around Advent, and for our THINK conference in March, but this book will be our main diet on Sundays and in Small Groups.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/08/a-church-for-exiles>

Let me help you understand why I think 1 Peter is so relevant and important. What is on my heart for us as a church? I have six goals for us:

1. That you would see the shifting cultural reality as an opportunity to be embraced not a trend to be feared.
2. To remind you who we really are and what our calling is all about because it is easy to forget.
3. So that you will not be surprised when you experience the weirdness of Christianity.
4. To drive you back to the Bible to see how relevant it is for your life.
5. So that you will see and appreciate the uniqueness of your church experience every Sunday.
6. To help you be mobilized toward godliness.

This month marks the one-year anniversary of the launch of Fishers Campus in the city of Fishers. We'll be talking more and more about the next steps for our Next Door Mission in our September and November Members' meetings. But the graphic of where our people live is very much on my heart because it gives me as visual of the potential opportunity that exists if we, as a church body, figure out how to really accomplish our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus in the places where God has positioned us six days a week.

My hope is to have us gather around 1 Peter for the next eight months, and then to send you into the world to fulfill the calling on your lives.

### **This Exiled Life**

I've given this series a title that attempts to connect the reality of your life with the biblical category of being an exile. My aim in this series is to help you see that being an exile means living out God's calling in your life with hopeful trust in His plan. The book encourages believers to keep trusting God as their Christian life becomes more and more challenging because of suffering or even persecution. Let me show you a few summary verses:

*<sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,<sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)*

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)*

*<sup>12</sup> By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. 1 Peter 5:12 (ESV)*

This book helps us reset our expectations and how we are to live when the culture becomes increasingly hostile and challenging. In other words, it helps us know how to live with God-centered trust when you suddenly realize, "Oh, I'm actually an exile now."

Some of you feel that already in your family because you are the only believer who will be present at Thanksgiving this year. Some of you feel that at work where the conversations seem to be a runaway train of post-modern thought, and you don't know if you should get off or pull the emergency brake. Some of you sense a looming cloud of potential challenges in your future career, the HR department of your place of employment, or culturally

in general. Some of you started school this year, and it honestly feels weird to be a committed Christian. Some of you recently moved into a new neighborhood, and you are trying to figure out how to build relationships with people who are not on the same page. And I really hope that there are some of you here who would not call yourselves a Christian, and you are trying to determine if there is a better way to live.

I want you to see Peter's vision for how to live as an exile. What does it look like to settle into an exiled life? Let's jump into verses 1-2, and we will see that from the beginning Peter lays out a vision that involves a calling, a plan and a hope. Let's look at each of these introductory aspects of the exiled life.

## **1. A Divine Calling**

The first element of the exiled life relates to the calling that God has placed upon these believers. The trajectory of their lives is connected to a very specific and loaded phrase: elect exiles of the Dispersion. That is a very significant statement that we need to unpack.

Before we dive into the specifics of that phrase, you need to understand a few things about the background of this calling and how it is set in the context of the book of 1 Peter. Whenever you are studying a book of the Bible, it is always helpful to know a few things about who wrote the book, to whom it was written, and what the reason was for the book to be written.

Verse 1 begins with a reference to Peter who calls himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ." The term apostle was an authoritative office ascribed to some within the early church who had been called by Christ and seen Him after His resurrection. Be careful if anyone today calls himself an apostle. The book is written by Peter, and while there are some scholars who question whether Peter wrote the book, there is, in my opinion, no compelling reason to doubt what 1:1 claims.

The letter was written to churches in modern-day Turkey. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia were provinces within the Roman Empire. The order may be because of the way in which the letter traveled as Silvanus brought it to various gatherings of believers.<sup>2</sup> The churches would have been mostly comprised of Gentiles, but some Jews may have been present. Peter's language in the letter seems to point toward primarily a Gentile audience (see 1:14, 18; 2:10; 4:3-4), but they must have known a fair amount of the Old Testament given the number of references to it.

The letter is written for people who are in the early stages of cultural opposition and limited persecution. The theme of suffering is all over the book (1:6-7; 2:18-20; 3:1, 13-1; 4:1-4, 12-19; 5:10). However, there is no mention of any of them having to give up their lives. There is more of a focus on verbal abuse (4:3-4) and some limited physical mistreatment (2:19-20). It doesn't appear that widespread, state-sanctioned persecution was taking place at this time, so the letter was written prior to the persecution under Nero in 64 A.D.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 49.

With that background on the first verse and divine calling, let me highlight three important words and help you understand why they are significant.

### **Dispersion**

This word simply means “scattered,” which is why other translations (like NASB or NIV) simply say something like “to those who are scattered.” The ESV chose to capitalize the word in order to identify that the word has more historical significance than simply “scattered.” You might compare it to the word “Pilgrim” in our vernacular. It is a word with an important story behind it.

For the early church, the idea of dispersion had ties back to the Old Testament and the traumatic times that the Jews were scattered from their homeland. “Dispersion” communicates displacement, being a refugee, and usually a longing for a return home. It is a loaded term that means “this is not home.” This is the only place where the word is used for non-Jewish people, and Peter uses it to strengthen the tone of the other words. He is using it in a metaphorical sense to connect his primary Gentile audience into the greater calling of their lives.

### **Exiles**

The word “exile” is closely connected to being part of the Dispersion, and it introduces a critical concept in 1 Peter. The people to whom Peter is writing are not necessarily physical exiles, but they are given a title that now fits their experience. They are outside of the mainstream at best; outcasts at worst. They are spiritual foreigners because their citizenship lies in another kingdom. They have no place or standing in the world because they are from some other place. They are spiritual refugees, Christian pilgrims, or spiritual aliens.

The word is only used two other places in the Bible:

*<sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged **that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.** <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:13–16)*

*<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you **as sojourners and exiles** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)*

In both cases the word identifies a significant distinction between God’s people and the people in the world. God’s people are different, out of place, and the effect is a different reason for living, a different way of living, and (as we’ll see later on in 1 Peter) a different treatment from the world. Being an exile is a very significant reality.

Being a spiritual exile is different than being a refugee or even a pilgrim in our context. A refugee’s aim is to settle into a permanent life that is stable, healthy, and no longer transient. No one wants to be a refugee for their entire lives. The goal for a refugee is for him or her to assimilate and settle into the culture, and the longer they are in a foreign culture, the more and more they integrate. But for spiritual refugees, over-integration or forgetting about

their true citizenship is not the goal. In fact, I would venture to say that if you are a Christian you know that the spiritual problem for you is not integration into our culture. The problem is usually that we are so enculturated with the world and its system that we don't really know how to live as exiles.

I'm finding that many Christians are struggling to know how to think and what to feel when Christianity is uncoupled from American culture. They are struggling to know how to live in a world where they are marginalized, criticized, laughed at, and derided. They are struggling with new categories of decisions when it comes to how we are to live in a post-Christian culture. They are struggling with how to be an engaged alien in this moment in history. But Peter uses this loaded term on purpose in order to connect us to our true identity, our ultimate citizenship, and divine calling.

### **Elect**

The final word is also very important because establishes this exiled life into the ultimate controlling reality of the universe: the sovereignty of God. The word "elect" simply means chosen by God. This term is used in the Old and New Testaments in reference to the activity of God where He sovereignly orchestrates the lives of His people. Israel was often called God's chosen people (Deut. 4:37), and closely tied to election is His love (Rom 9:25-26).

Now there is great mystery here as to why God does what He does. When I preached on Romans 9 and 11 I unpacked that for you. But it is here for a reason. Namely, there is a promise here that behind the difficulties, the challenges, the opposition, and even the suffering, is the sovereignty of God. If you are a follower of Jesus, there is a divine calling on your life.

God placed you in the family into which you were born. He put you in this moment in history. He has placed you in the job, neighborhood, fraternity, sorority, and math class that you are in. There are no coincidences and everything, including suffering, falls under the dominion of a God who is never out of control.

This really matters for two reasons. First, it helps us trust in God when life gets difficult and painful. We may face unfortunate events and hurtful people, but we can rest and trust, knowing that God is still sovereign. Do you need to be reminded about that today? Do you need to remind your heart that God is still in control?

Secondly, this matters because the divine calling means that God has not placed us on earth to simply integrate into the culture, go incognito, and never live like an exile. This divine calling means that there is divine purpose for a believer's life, and we need to be sure that we are on the same page as God when it comes to why we are here. Some Christians are shocked when criticism, opposition, or suffering comes because they want dual citizenship – benefits in both the world and Christ's kingdom. But the divine calling on our lives means that our mission, our purpose, and our identity are clear. God chose us for this moment. We are elect exiles.

### **2. A Divine Plan**

The second aspect of this exiled life relates to the cosmic plan of God in salvation. Peter is trying, from the outset of his letter, to root his readers not only in the divine calling but also in God's plan of redemption. In other words, in order to understand how to live as an exile in the world, you need to know what the ultimate goal really is. Why

is suffering worth it? Why is there a category of exile? Where is the arc of human history headed? These are the issues that are underneath our lives and hardship.

Therefore, Peter identifies four key phrases all of which relate in one way or another to the plan of redemption. Let me briefly unpack them:

- **“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”** – the idea here is more than just that God knows what is going to happen. Foreknowledge is linked to God’s sovereign love. To be foreknown is to be loved in the same way that Jesus was loved by the Father (see 1 Peter 1:20). It is linked to His covenantal, redemptive love. The hymn writer Trevor Francis (1834-1925) tried to capture the sovereign love of God this way:

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!  
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!  
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!*

- **“in the sanctification of the Spirit”** – It is God’s divine plan to make His people holy through the Holy Spirit. This is one of those references to definite sanctification or positional sanctification.
- **“for obedience to Jesus Christ”** – In light of 1 Peter 1:22, it seems that this is yet another way of describing conversion. God’s plan is to redeem a people who pledge their fealty to Jesus.
- **“and for sprinkling with his blood”** - Peter is picking up an Old Testament ceremony where a person was made clean or a covenant was inaugurated by the sprinkling of blood, as people pledged obedience to their covenant keeping God.<sup>3</sup>

When you put this all together, it is clear that Peter is using the deep well of the gospel to anchor these exiles to why they should be living the exiled life. By using these four phrases, Peter is reminding them as to what is really important and what is truly valuable.

This is part of the reason why you need the Word in your life, why you need to sing with the people of God, and why you should listen carefully to the preaching of the gospel. It reminds you what is worth living for, what is worth suffering for, and even what is worth dying for. We need our affections regularly challenged because they leak. Our hearts can tend toward devaluing God’s redemptive plan, and we can replace it with our plan to be liked by people, to be like everyone else in the world, and to not stand firm in the faith. The glory of God in the gospel is the joy that is set before us, and so we are called, like Jesus, to run our race (Hebrews 12:1-2).

So do not be surprised if this book invites you to be holier than you are now. Don’t be surprised if this book speaks into how you do your work, what your marriage looks like, how you talk, what you do or don’t do at parties, and how you handle hurtful, spiteful people. Being an exile is costly, yet completely understandable when you see the beauty of the gospel and love it more than anything else. But living as an exile is really, really hard when you

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, 56.

just want to add your affections for the gospel to all the other affections. This exiled life requires you to stake your claim on the supreme worthiness of the gospel.

### **3. Divinely Provided Hope**

The last aspect of this exiled life comes from Peter's prayer for these believers. After talking with them about their calling and the plan of God, he now turns to the two things that he longs for them to receive in abundant measure: grace and peace.

What do people in spiritual exile need? They need grace and peace. They need grace, which is God's undeserved mercy and help, in order for people to be pleasing to him. They need grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16). They need God's power in their lives to follow him. But they also need peace, the deep-seated assurance that God is on his throne, his promises are true, and that "all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

So what do you need today? Do you need grace? Do you need peace for what you face? Has following Jesus proven to be costly and more challenging than you planned for? Are you fearful as you look to the future? Do you need grace to embrace an exile mindset? Do you need the grace of repentance from a leaky heart? Do you need peace to be kind in the face of unfairness and injustice?

This exiled life is a divine calling, connected to a divine plan with divinely provided hope through grace and peace. In other words, it is a life marked by living out your calling while trusting in God's plan and provision.

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