

This Exiled Life – Part 2

Living Stones and God’s People

1 Peter 2:4-10

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⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:4–10 (ESV)

We are back into 1 Peter again, discovering what it means to be an exile, and making our way through chapter 2. Last week we learned about the purifying effect of the Word and how it affects sin issues like malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. I challenged you to consider whether your passion for the Word fits with the model of a newborn infant. And I hope that some of you are joining us in digesting the Word by memorizing it through the Fighter Verses.

Last week’s Fighter Verse from Romans 10 identified a direct connection between coming to faith in Christ, the call of God, believing, and preaching. Something beautiful and important happens as the Word of God is proclaimed.

Our church has always been a place where people love the Word. In fact, there used to be what I called “the College Park Umm,” which was the sound that the congregation made when a good and meaningful point was made. It still happens, but it was easier to hear in our old sanctuary. So, did you come ready to hear the Word, to study the Word, and to obey the Word?

Important Questions for Exiles

1 Peter 1 provided an introduction of sorts to the idea of what it means to be an exile. 1 Peter 2 extends that further by identifying what the community of exiles should be like. Being an exile is not something that is only expressed individually, but it is also something that relates to all those who are gathered. Being a Christian exile is done together with other Christian exiles.

Our text this morning, 1 Peter 2:4-10, is a fascinating one because it is not a text mostly about what exiles are to do. It is also a text that is full of statements that talk about identity, about who the exiles really are, and about the bigger picture.

This text tries to get underneath the circumstances of what they are experiencing, and it aims to strengthen their confidence in who they are and what is really going on. If you have ever walked through a very traumatic season which has proven costly, you probably understand why this text is here better than you even realize. You see, when life becomes costly, it forces us to wrestle with some really big and foundational questions. That is what makes the exile experience so helpful at one level.

Becoming an exile forces you to wrestle with questions like these:

- Is following Jesus really worth it?
- Do I really believe this?
- Does God know what is happening to me?
- Can I really trust Him?

This passage is designed to serve as a spiritual reset, helping us to understand the bigger picture. And in doing so, Peter gives us some really important thoughts about how we should think about our time of exile, especially when it proves costly. This text serves as a compass, helping us to know where true north is.

Let me show you three critical and foundational questions this text answers. These questions serve as directional guideposts for navigating this exiled life.

Question 1: What is God's Plan?

This first question is extremely important and foundational. It is the answer to the question that we sometimes ask when we are in pain: *What is going on here?* How long has it been since you've asked that question?

Peter helps us understand that God is working out His divine plan to form Christlikeness in all of us together. That's the goal, the purpose, and the reason underneath everything that is happening. Now we may not know exactly how our individual circumstances fit into that big plan, but it is very helpful to know the beautiful picture behind the story of our lives.

Let's look at a few things from verses 4-5 and 6-8:

The plan involves the worship of Jesus. Verse four says "as you come to him," which followed the statement about tasting and seeing the Lord's goodness in 2:3. If you were to skip ahead to the end of verse five, you would see Jesus listed very specifically. It is clear that the "him" of verse four and the "Lord" of verse three is referring to Jesus. What's more, the use of the words "come to him" has a worship context to it since in the Old Testament, that phrase was often used in reference to coming before God in the tabernacle or in the temple (Lev. 9:7-8). The same word is also used in Hebrews 4:16

– “let us then with confidence draw near . . .”¹ Coming to Him means worship. And He is called a “living stone,” which brings together both His resurrection and a building/temple metaphor that we will talk about in a few minutes.

The focal point of the exile is the person of Jesus. He is the centerpiece of redemption, the one who made salvation possible, and one who deserves all the glory and honor. Without Him, there is no forgiveness, no cleansing, and no right relationship with God. Christian exiles are exiles because of their love and relationship with Jesus. He is more lovely, more desirable, more attractive, and more appealing than anything that we’ve suffered the loss of. You don’t become a Christian exile and you don’t stay a Christian exile unless you love Jesus. And what unites the body of Christ, despite our differences, is our common love for Jesus. God’s plan is about coming to Him, the Living Stone.

The plan involves a contrast between being loved by God and being rejected by people. Verse four describes Jesus (as the Living Stone) as being both chosen and precious to God and being rejected by men. Jesus’ life was marked by favor from God and persecution at the hands of men. It is this contrast that led to the cross, and it is this contrast that identifies what it means to be a follower of Jesus. In other words, to be a Christian exile means that God loves us deeply and that we can expect significant levels of rejection. It is what happened to Jesus, and it is what happens to those who follow Jesus.

Here is how Jesus framed this with His disciples in John 16: ³³ *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*” John 16:33 (NLT)

Being an exile means that you understand that this is what being a Christian is all about. There are enormous and important contrasts in the Christian life – the kind that Jesus Himself experienced.

The plan involves the church being built together into Christlikeness. After calling Christ a living stone, Peter then says that these believers are “like living stones.” So there is a direct connection between what Jesus is and what they are. There is a living quality to them which is related to the life of Jesus. And there is also an important statement about being built up into a spiritual house. God is making them into a spiritual temple that has the characteristics of Jesus.

Given the prominence and the importance of temple in the Jewish mind, can you imagine how this landed on the heart of these Gentiles? God was doing something in them that was really special. And He was doing it in all of them. They were a part of something bigger than themselves. Together they were being built into the likeness of Jesus.

The question then becomes *Do you see this spiritual building process as something that is wonderful and special?* Because if you do not value this process, you will not be able to endure.

The plan involves a divine reckoning. By this I mean that God’s plan involves a very clear divide. There are those who believe and those who do not. There are those who are under God’s mercy and

¹ Grudem, Wayne. *1 Peter – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 97.

those who are under judgment. There are those who obey and those who disobey. And God's plan involves a future accountability based upon what a person has done with Jesus. In verses 6-8, Peter quotes three Old Testament passages which are related to judgment. The contrast is very clear and stark: those who believe are not put to shame and are honored (vv. 6b-7) and those who do not believe stumble and disobey (vv. 7-8).

This is important because, even now, what a person believes about Jesus creates real division. Being an exile means that you do everything to not needlessly create this, but it is there. The apostle Paul said Christians are an aroma of life for believers but an aroma of death for nonbelievers (2 Cor. 2:16). So, there is a division that exists. Being an exile is normal.

But it also means that there is a future day of judgment coming – a day when those who believe will not be put to shame. There is a coming day when God will right all wrongs, make everything just, and everything unfair will once and for all be dealt with.

If you are not a follower of Jesus, this passage helps you understand what it really means to live out the Christian life. This text shows you what is underneath the plan and mission of God in the world. You see, we have been so changed by Jesus in ways that are so deep that they affect how we view everything. And we'd love for you to come to know Him today.

Now, if you are Christian exile, what I just shared with you is really, really important. You will only make it through your exile if you understand the basics about God's plan – that it's about the exaltation of Jesus and not you, that acceptance by God but rejection by man is normal, that God is on a mission to build up His church into the likeness of Jesus, and that there is a day in the future when believing in Him will be totally worth it.

Knowing these things is how you make it when tough questions surface, because following Jesus is costly. God has a plan, and it is critical for His exiles to understand what that plan is all about.

But this text talks not only about God's plan but also about who the followers of Jesus really are, which is the second question.

Question 2: Who are We?

1 Peter 2 is one of the most stunning passages in the New Testament that connects the history of the Old Testament and all of its rich Jewish heritage to the mission to reach the Gentiles. What we are going to see in verses five and nine is the way that Peter uses metaphor after metaphor to help these Gentile exiles know how special they really are.

This pastoral tone began in 1:1 when Peter called them elect exiles of dispersion. The use of the term "dispersion" has all kinds of Jewish history to it, and Peter is trying to help these exiles really understand the spiritual identity that is theirs. They are the people of God. Even though they are not Jewish, they share in the mission and the blessing of God. It is not, in my view, that they have replaced

God's plan for the Jewish people (cf. Rom. 11:1-10) but rather that these Gentiles, like all Gentiles, are grafted into the promises of God to the people of God.²

So what does their identity now look like? Who are they? What blessings have they received? Let's look at these descriptions:

Living Stones/Spiritual House. We touched on this already, but it sets the context for a number of other things that will follow. God is in the process of building them up into a temple for God's presence in the same way that the temple was the center of a Jewish person's life. The glory of the temple is expressed in them.

Here is how Paul says this in Ephesians 2:19-22:

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)

What an amazing thing to consider! Even today – right now – God, by His Spirit, is inhabiting this place and building us up into something greater than ourselves.

Holy Priesthood/Royal Priesthood. This is so important that Peter says it twice – in verse five and verse nine. It is a remarkable thing to say because the priests were the only ones who were allowed into the holy places, and they were the ones who offered sacrifices on behalf of others. The role was special, and you had to be born into the right tribe. But now Peter describes all of them as priests who offer acceptable spiritual sacrifices because of Jesus.

This is amazing for three reasons. First, it means that God considers ordinary people to be as pure as the priests. These Gentiles can come boldly and confidently. Second, it means that they do not need any intermediary to intercede for them. Christians can come into God's presence because of the work of Christ on their behalf. Jesus has made ordinary people – even Gentiles – to be spiritual priests! Third, the sacrifices that these Christians offer are acceptable to God.

And just keep in mind that all of this is because of what Jesus did, and it is who they are. They don't become priests. They don't act in a priestly way. They *are* a holy priesthood. They *are* a royal priesthood.

Chosen Race/Holy Nation. This identity marker is particularly special, and it has some implications for this weekend. For the Jewish people, race, and nation were one and the same. To be born a Jew meant that you were a part of the nation of Israel. And Gentiles are defined as people who are non-Jewish. Now Peter extends that metaphor beyond just the borders of Israel, and he calls them a chosen race and a holy nation.

² For a full treatment of this see: <http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/grafted-into-grace/>

What he is getting at here is what makes the church so beautiful and powerful. The gospel gets underneath the most obvious and apparent categories by which we identify and divide ourselves. Nations have boundaries and ethnicity involves particular characteristics that make you different from someone else.

By calling these people a chosen race and a holy nation, Peter is indicating that the gospel is able to get underneath the most significant and strongest barriers and divisions that exist. These exiles didn't stop Gentiles being Gentiles or Jews being Jewish. Instead God is communicating here that there is an identity underneath what they think about identity. And this new, spiritual identity serves to unite them with Jewish believers in a way that says something really beautiful about Christ and the people of God.

Paul said something nearly identical in Galatians 3:28-29 and Colossians 3:11:

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:28–29 (ESV)

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3:11 (ESV)

Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and this is a good place to acknowledge that while our country has made progress in relations between different ethnicities, we still have long way to go. The cultural wound of slavery has left a scar upon our nation that is still tender, sensitive, and part of a painful and inhumane story of injustice. Ethnic divisions are still a part of our culture, and in some cases they are still systemic.

1 Peter 2 shows us, once again, the potential power of the gospel. Our common relationship with Jesus creates an identity that supersedes all other categories or divisions – even ethnicity. The effect is that we are not Latino Christians, Black Christians, White Christians, Asian Christians or whatever ethnic division you want to use. Instead we are Christians who happen to be Black, Latino, Asian, or White. And, friends, let me tell you that one of the most visible ways that we can demonstrate that we are different than the culture and the world is by how we love one another in Christ, regardless of our ethnicity.

When we love each other in the midst of our differences, we make a powerful statement about what is our ultimate identity. And the crisis of exile often creates this opportunity. As the pressure, negativity, and divisions rear their ugly head in our culture, it is a great platform for our identity in the gospel to shine forth.

Let me speak to those of you in the minority culture. This new identity also gives you great encouragement when you still feel like an outsider. Some of you are a part of *this* "exile community," and yet it still feels as though you are an exile. The remnants of misunderstanding and racism are felt by you, and I cannot imagine how painful that is. But when that happens, this is a great place to go. You can remind your heart that your identity is rooted not in how you are treated or in what people

(even Christians) think about you, but in who you are in Christ. And that may even help you to keep coming back to your small group, your Bible Study, or Sunday morning worship. You are a chosen race and a holy nation.

God's People/Graced People. The final identity marker relates to God's relationship with us. Verse 9 says "a people for his own possession." What a statement! It means that you belong to God. It means that this entire community of people belongs to God. It means that every community of believers belong to Him.

One of the precious statements that Jesus made is found in John 10:27-29. Just listen to it!

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. John 10:27–29 (ESV)

When you are in a situation that makes you realize that you are an exile, you need this kind of assurance and all kinds of other assurances in the Bible. You need to know that you have eternal life and no one is able to snatch you out of Jesus' hand.

And you need to celebrate the amount of grace that you have received! I love verse 10!

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10 (ESV)

Christian exiles need to be reminded that they are God's people and that they have been graced by God with so much mercy. This mindset and reminder serves as a ballast for their souls when the exile becomes costly.

Knowing who you are. Knowing what God has done for you. Knowing what you are at the core of who you are as a Christian exile. These are key ways that God sustains you. When it is costly to follow Jesus, it is then that you need to be reminded about what is at the foundation of your life.

Maybe you need to be reminded about that right now. Maybe you need to be reminded that your worth, your value, your passion, and your sense of purpose are rooted in the work of Jesus. Maybe you need to know that no one can take that away from you. And maybe you need to be reminded that no matter what happens to you, the gracious imprint of God's work through Jesus in you is untouchable.

You are an exile! And that means that your identity is rooted in the very heart of God's work in you.

That leads us to the final question.

Question 3: What is our Mission?

When life becomes difficult, when it is costly to follow Jesus, when you are called to suffer loss for the name of Jesus, you need to be reminded about the reason why you are here.

Verse nine states it clearly and beautifully: *“that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.”* In other words, the mission that God has given us is to make known the beautiful and glorious story of what God has done for us.

Our mission in life, and the reason that we were redeemed, is to make known the beauty of God. If you are a follower of Jesus, you were called out of darkness and into His marvelous light. That is what happened to you. After you met Jesus, you saw things so differently! Why did God do this?

He did not do it just so that you would know where you would go when you die. He did it so that the entire created order would marvel at His mercy and grace. Our mission in life is to make the beauty and the grace of God obvious to a watching world. The purpose of our lives, and the reason for our redemption, is to platform the praise of God in the world.

If you get this mindset, it helps you navigate through the pain and trial of being an exile. When you suddenly realize that you are an exile, you have just a few seconds to reconnect to this truth and to remind your heart, *God is going to be magnified in this!* And if your mission in life is to magnify God, then the effects of the exile fit into this very well.

But if your aim is just to add Jesus to your American dream life, being an exile doesn't work. At best, it's annoying and embarrassing. At worst, it's not what you love, so you choose to not be identified that way. However, if you love and cherish the glory of God, then suffering any kind of loss is seen in light of who God is and what He has done.

Peter wants these believers and us to realize what God is doing, who we really are, and what our mission is.

Being an exile will be costly at some level. And when it comes, there will be understandable and important questions that surface. Thank God that we have such a wonderful resource in the Scriptures that can shape our minds and hearts to know how to think about our exile as God's people.

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