

ELECT EXILES

“How to Stay on Mission”

1 Peter 5:1-14

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Sunday, July 19, 2020 (Ordinary Time)

Scripture Reading

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ” (1 Peter 5:1–14, ESV).

Introduction

Today, we are concluding our study of the New Testament book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a letter written by the Apostle Peter, who was one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Writing to the churches of Asia Minor (which is located in modern-day Turkey), Peter is teaching Christians how to live faithfully as God’s people in a culture that is growing increasingly hostile to the gospel and has even begun to persecute them.¹

In this place of social estrangement, Peter encourages his readers by reminding them that they are to see themselves as *“elect exiles”* (1 Pt 1:1). As God’s “elect,” they are to

¹ D.A. Carson and Douglass J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992, 2005), 639.

rejoice that they have been chosen and loved by God as his holy people. Nevertheless, as “exiles,” they are to live as God’s holy people in a world that is not their own. Thus, as a whole, the letter of 1 Peter is meant to equip Christians to faithfully live out their identity as the people of God in the midst of a culture that is often opposed to them.

This message, I believe, is just as important for Christians today as it was for the Christians of the first century. Many Christians in modern-day America are finding themselves living in a culture in which Christianity is often misunderstood and mistrusted. Nevertheless, because God is sovereign and God is good, we can also trust that he has sent us as missionaries in this time and this place to represent his kingdom to the world.

As God’s people, we should not expect to be popular, but nor should we be discouraged when culture opposes us. As Dr. Russell D. Moore has written in his book *Onward*: *“...we should see ourselves as a prophetic minority... To say that we are a minority is not to talk as pollsters or economists would, in terms of numbers. It is to speak in terms of a mindset, how we view ourselves. The church of Jesus Christ is never a majority – in any fallen culture – even if we happen to outnumber everyone else around us. The Scripture speaks of a world system that is at odds with the kingdom, a world to which we are constantly tempted to pattern our own intellects and affections after, until we are interrupted by the ongoing transformation of the kingdom.”*²

Chapter 5 is a concluding charge to be faithful as a prophetic minority that declares and displays the kingdom of God in the midst of a hostile world. It is a final encouragement that is meant to instruct us *“How to Stay on Mission”* as God’s people.

Exposition

As we delve deeper into this final chapter of 1 Peter, I want to draw out three essential truths that we must remember if we are to stay on mission as God’s elect exiles: *1.) Remember the Church, 2.) Remember the True Enemy, and 3.) Remember the True Gospel of Grace.*

1.) Remember the Church.

The church is essential to the mission of God, and the mission of God is essential to the church. All throughout the New Testament, the church is presented as the visible community of God’s kingdom on earth and the primary vehicle of Christ’s continuing ministry to the world. The church is to show the watching world what humanity is called to be, but could never be apart from Christ. Thus, a church that is on mission must be a distinctive people, a people filled with humility, grace, and service. And this distinctiveness begins with leaders.

² Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 29.

In the New Testament, elders are the highest office of leadership in the church. They are the leaders that are responsible for guarding the doctrine of the church, setting the direction of the church, and caring for the members of the church.

Peter identifies himself as a “fellow elder” (συμπρεσβύτερος) of the church speaking to “elders” (Πρεσβυτέρους) of the church (1 Pt 5:1). And he charges elders to be leaders who are known by their humble service in a world that is built on pride and performance.

These elders are to serve not with begrudging duty, but with willing hearts. They are to be motivated not by selfish gain or the need for significance, but rather with eagerness for the kingdom. They are not to be domineering over those whom they lead, but rather they are to be Godly examples (1 Pt 5:2-3). Now this does not mean we should expect elders to be perfect. But we should expect elders to be humble and repentant.

The Bible teaches that elders are subject both to greater judgment and reward.³ Elders will receive “*an unfading crown of glory*” (1 Pt 5:4), but as the book of Revelation shows us, at the end of the story, all crowns belong to Jesus (cf. Rev 4:10).

Peter then charges the members of the church, particularly young men, to submit and “be subject to” (ὑποτάγητε) to the elders of the church (1 Pt 5:5). This shows us that the church is by design meant to be multigenerational.⁴ Essentially, he is saying beginning with the eldership all the way down to the culture of the younger generations in the body of Christ, a mutual culture submission and “humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνην) is essential to our mission.

This necessarily means we need to be connected and accountable to local church. We need community. In fact, when Peter gives shout outs to Silvanus (Silas) and Mark, he is showing us that even this letter was dependent on Christian community (1 Pt 5:12-13). The truth is you can’t submit to anyone if you are a lone ranger Christian. But more than that, in these last few verses, Peter also calls our attention the role that we play in the larger body of Christ “*throughout the world*” (1 Pt 5:9).

The Christians in Asia Minor are suffering. But they are not suffering alone. Peter even concludes his letter by saying, “*She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings*” (1 Pt 5:13). In the Old Testament, Babylon was the symbol of the great city of the world empire. Thus, since very early times, Christians have interpreted this reference to mean that Peter is writing as a pastor who is serving in the church within the city of Rome.⁵

The fact that there is a church in Rome underscores the unlikely power of the church. The movement of the church began in Jerusalem, and in the course of just a few decades

³ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*. The Bible Speaks Today commentary series. Ed. John R. W. Stott. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 208.

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem. *1 Peter*. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Vol. 17. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 199.

⁵ Clowney, 224.

has a presence in the most powerful city in the world! We might not view the church as anything special. But our participation in the church is a participation in the most important and transformative movement within human history!

This year, of all years, we need to remember the importance of the church. In a time of increased isolation, frustration, and misinformation, it is a time we need to embrace the importance of the church.

This last week, I read a haunting report from the Barna Research group that was published earlier this month that stated one-third of all practicing Christians in America have stopped engaging their local church during this time of COVID-19.⁶ That means that one out of three practicing believers is no longer connected to a local expression of the body of Christ, whether that is through in-person worship, online services, or even small groups.

And some of you might say, well, I don't need to be connected to a local church. I don't trust organized religion. I have a personal relationship with Jesus, and that is all I need!

But I want to pastorally pushback against that way of thinking. To think that you do not need the local church is not a counter-cultural or profound way of thinking. In fact, *it is a way of thinking that caters to the radical individualism and distrust of authority within American culture.*

The Bible does not teach a spirituality of exclusive individualism. The Bible does call us to personal, heartfelt faith in God. But the gospel of Jesus Christ also summons us to participate in the community of God's people. Through God's people, the church we challenged and comforted and cultivated into spiritual maturity. When we worship together, fellowship together, sit under the teaching of God's word together, and received the sacraments together, the Holy Spirit of God actively forms us into the image of Christ (cf. Col 3:12-17).

And make no mistake, you are being spiritually formed. The question is, how are you being formed, and who is forming you?

If you are not being formed by the Spirit of God through the community of the church, you are being formed by the Spirit of the Age through the community of the world.

So, I encourage you: now more than ever, press into the local church.

2.) Remember the True Enemy.

Christians will often feel opposed and persecuted. In fact, Christians will often feel like they are at war. But here, Peter reminds us that our war is not with people or culture. He

⁶ <https://www.barna.com/research/new-sunday-morning-part-2/?fbclid=IwAR3yxxRDmYBdtpv7q3EIAhF7z6f2pR-QY176xg45AvCz8KtbuRvOPAeSfg>

says, *“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8).*

Many will find the notion of the “devil” (διάβολος) and demons utterly ridiculous within such a sophisticated, technological, and scientific age. But in this age of so-called enlightenment, that we are having a more and more difficult time explaining away the enduring reality of true evil.

The biblical worldview suggests that part of the continual presence of evil in this world comes from the presence of a personal, proactive, and spiritual force that is opposed to God and his people. This is Satan. And throughout the story of Scripture, Satan has sought to distract, discourage, deceive, and destroy God’s people.

Thus, if we are to stay on mission, we must be sober-minded and watchful. This means that we should not cower in obsessive fear before Satan, nor should we ignore him.⁷

In teaching Christians about Satan, Peter uses the image of a “roaring lion” (λέων ὠρυόμενος). Lions had a very particular connotation in the first century [show “The Christian Martyrs’ Last Prayer”(1833)].⁸ If you lived then, and you heard the word lion, you weren’t thinking about Simba from *The Lion King*. You thought about the beast in the local coliseum that publicly ate people for entertainment. Thus, a lion isn’t something to be taken lightly. Sin and deception are never something to be casually flirted with. Satan wants to destroy you with sin – he has no other goal.

But in our age, I think the symbol of the lion takes on a new dimension. In the wild, a lion hunts best when it is unseen by its prey. So too, the devil hunts stealthily in our secularist doubt, as a lion hides in the tall grass.

The answer to this is simply to stand firm in our faith. We are to resist temptation while depending on the Lord to be our defense. This can be compared with Ephesians 6:11-12: *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:11-12).*

Now if you will allow me to get nerdy for a moment, let me tell you something about the Greek in this text. In Greek, the verbs always tell us more information than the English translation. Something that this verse is meant to convey is that it is directed not toward individuals, but rather toward a community. The armor of God is not for “you” it is for “y’all.” You can’t put on the armor of God, but y’all can! The armor of God is to be worn by the body of Christ, and the body of Christ is the church.

When lions hunt, they startle a flock of prey until they see one animal flee away from the group. Then, that animal is the one they pursue. Don’t let the enemy isolate you in this

⁷ Grudem, 202, 204.

⁸ Clowney, 211.

season. Stand in Christ. Be connected to the body of Christ. It is not easy. But it has never been more important.

Lastly, on this point, it is worth pointing out that this discussion on spiritual warfare flows out of a command to be less anxious: ***“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pt 5:6-7).*** Now, I find this a little odd, because if I am telling someone to be less anxious, the last thing I would want them to think about is Satan and demons.

However, Peter is encouraging Christians to be aware of the spiritual reality that surrounds them because he wants them to be motivated to depend on God. *When we believe the myth that we are in control, we will be much more subject to anxiety.* But when we realize that our only hope is to depend on the power of God, we will run to him that we might find rest under his mighty hand. The key to overcoming anxiety is resting humbly under God’s gracious sovereignty.

We live in an age of great anxiety. This year has been exhausting and awful, and the fall looks uncertain and terrifying. And if there is any silver lining to these circumstances, it is that the Lord has mercifully exposed the illusion that we are in control over our reality. All of our best technology and planning and posturing cannot endure the unbearable weight of a world filled with chaos. And if we try to bear that weight in our own strength, we will eventually collapse into anxiety.

But the Lord gives us an invitation. He tells us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand. He calls us to acknowledge and embrace our frailty, our limitation, and our dependence. He calls us to rest in his sovereignty and power. He calls us to pray our tears and our fears; to unload our burdens before him so that he might give us peace.

The devil roams around like a lion, but Jesus is the greater lion.⁹

3.) Remember the True Gospel of Grace.

As verse 1 of chapter 5 has reminded us, Peter is an elder. He is also an apostle who has witnessed the death and resurrection of Jesus. But, first and foremost, Peter is also a Christian, a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. He is also simply a sinner who needs to be saved by grace.

This is why Peter ends his letter by saying, ***“This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it” (1 Pt 5:12).***

And Peter knows true grace personally. Peter knew grace when it called him to leave a life catching fish to become a fisher of men. Peter knew grace when it called him to walk

⁹ David R Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing in Christ’s Sufferings*. Preaching the Word commentary series. Ed. R. Kent Hughes. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 171.

on water. Peter knew grace when he saw the glory of God shine in face of Christ on the mount of transfiguration.

But Peter also knew grace when he betrayed Christ. He knew grace when he wept bitterly over his own sin and shame. And Peter knew grace when he was restored¹⁰ by Jesus so that he could be one of the primary leaders of the early church.

This is hope for those who have loved ones who have gone astray. This is hope if *you* are one who has gone astray. Maybe you are the one who has denied Christ. Maybe you are the one who betrayed him. No matter how great your sin may be, Jesus' love is greater. No matter how far you've gone away, you are not outside of the reach of God's true grace.

Pastor Timothy Keller once wrote: *"A Christian is more flawed and sinful than you'd ever dare believe and yet more loved and accepted than you'd every dare hope – at the same moment."*¹¹

The story of Peter reminds us, Jesus called the unworthy and the unlikely. So too, Jesus still calls the unworthy and the unlikely. He invites us out of our old ways and into something new. He invites us to the dawn of a new day. He invites us into true grace.

Conclusion

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we be a people who faithfully live out our identity as God's elect exiles in the midst of a broken world. In an age of COVID and chaos, may we remember our mission. And may we rest in the true grace of God!

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

- 1. 1 Peter 5:1-5 teaches about local church elders and the importance of humble, mutual submission within the community of a local church. Why do you think these concepts – eldership, humility, community, the church – are so important to Peter's overall message to the "elect exiles" (1 Pt 1:1)?*
- 2. Compare 1 Peter 5:8-9 with Ephesians 6:10-18 and James 4:7. What are some of the common threads in these passages on spiritual warfare? How should we apply these concepts to our lives?*
- 3. What are some of the big ideas or themes that have stuck out to you in the book of 1 Peter? What are some concrete, practical ways that this book should shape our lives?*

¹⁰ The word for "restore" in verse 10 is a fishing term elsewhere translated "mend." Helm, 172.

¹¹ Timothy Keller. *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*. (New York: Viking, 2015), 105.

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