



July 19, 2015  
1 Peter 2:11-4:11  
Pastor Phil Ward

## The Christian as Exile, Part 2

Hi Everyone. My name is Larry Adams and I want to take a moment to thank you for downloading the podcast of this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's Word all over the world.

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We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope these messages you are using, to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Phil Ward:

*Father, we've gathered. There's a name to worship, and it isn't our own, it's You. It is the name above all names, and at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. There is no other name under Heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved, than Jesus. There is no greater source of strength, source of joy, than Jesus. God, we think about who He is, and what He has done for us, and that He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God. That the righteous One died for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. So that in Your presence, where there is fullness of joy, we may experience it, unhindered, unrelenting, and God, we give You thanks for these truths. There are 10,000 reasons or more why we can praise You, but they all culminate and they all flow from Jesus. So God, I pray that You would help me and my mouth, to be used by You, to boast only in the cross of Christ by which I have been crucified to this world, and the world has been crucified to me. In whose blood there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and God that You would be honored, that You would be lifted up, and that You would meet with us and teach us in ways that we all need. So God, as David (Morgan) prayed and sang, help us to behold Your word, that we may see wondrous things. Speak now for Your glory and our joy, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Good morning! (tepid response) Eh! I'm not impressed! But you were the best of the three services thus far, but still - . I was going to give ice cream to everyone, and you

failed. Just kidding. I encourage you to stay and hang out at the new Hebrews Bistro patio out on the plaza. It would be cool if we stayed to hang out together! Get to know the people who sit near you!

My name is Phil Ward. I am one of the pastors here, of a young adult ministry here called Kairos. I preached here a couple months ago and I am doing this mini-series on Christianity and culture. So, from the time that I first preached until this morning, we've had a thing called "Ask GHCC Live", an event with the topic of Christianity and Culture, so some of us pastors got together to pool our ignorance and did what we could to answer some questions. Since then we've had a lot of different things transpire in our culture. We've lost 9 brothers and sisters in Charleston, SC. We've had a Supreme Court decision on gay marriage. A lot of stuff happened since I last preached. I didn't see these things happening, by the way. But it did cause me to ask this question of "What do we do?" It caused me to ask, "How do we engage the culture around us as Christians? What do we do from here on out?"

And as a parent, one of the things that has most challenged me, is this thinking. The question I ask myself is, Hey, ok, Phil, in light of what's going on in our culture, in light of what I believe about the gospel and the nature of who Christ is -- What am I going to do to disciple my children as Christ-followers in such a way that they are able to engage the culture around them.

How am I going to do that? How are you going to do that? How are you and I collectively, going to disciple the next generation and prepare them to live Christian lives in the culture we live in? As I thought about that, I was thinking, you know what? The best thing for us to do is to teach our kids and the next generation, not merely what to think, but *how* to think. What I mean is, often times we as a church, we don't spend the qualitative time that we need to, to really cultivate the mind, the discipleship of the mind. It is not something that we experience a lot, but I'm here to say, one of the things we need to do is, instead of me just telling you what to think and you taking that and telling your kids, this is what you should think, this is what you should do.

Instead, we should pause and come back, look at the scriptures, and reflect on what it says, and ask ourselves the question, not only what does the scripture say, but how does this intersect with the culture in which we live? What I am saying is this, we as Christians don't need to merely pass on what to think but we need to teach *how* to think about Christian engagement with the culture, because it isn't simple.

If we are not thinking people, we become robotic, and people won't understand how to relate and how to respond appropriately, Biblically, gospel-centeredly, if we don't teach how to think about these matters. So, if you showed up this morning, thinking, I'm going to go to church, I'm going to get a couple of little nuggets, take them home, apply them and then forget them by Wednesday! It's going to be a good day! -- Then you've come to the wrong place.

Today, I'm not going to just focus on what to think about Christianity and culture, what I want to do instead is look at the scriptures themselves, and then begin to think about the culture we live in, and then ask, *how do the two wed together?* How do I process? How do I become winsomely engaged with the culture? How do I do so articulately? How do I do so appropriately? I won't tell you what to do or how to do it, but we need to ask ourselves, How do we think through these topics?

That's what I want to do this morning, with the book of 1 Peter. We'll be there, and we'll be all over the place, but that's primarily where we'll be. What I want you to see is this: as we will see in 1 Peter, he identifies Christians as exiles. You and I are exiles. Living as exiles means that we understand our identity as the people of God and proclaim the gospel to our host culture. So we look at 1 Peter and we ask, how does Christianity engage with culture? You have to realize that the Christian is an exile in this culture. As an exile, we then ask ourselves, how are we to live, therefore? I'm here to say, living as an exile means that we have to understand our identity as the people of God and we have to understand that we have to explain the gospel to our host culture. That's what we are here to do. I'll show you that that is true.

Many of you might remember some of the things I talked about last time I preached, it was on Jeremiah 29, the letter that Jeremiah wrote to the exiles at the time which God was sending His people out from Jerusalem to Babylon. As I was reading that, an interesting thing happened to me. A while back I was preaching through Ezra and Nehemiah for our young adult ministry, so I was studying the historical context, reading through Jeremiah, but at the same time, I was reading in my personal time, learning what 1 Peter was all about, and then I started to realize – oh my goodness! – there's a lot of correlation, a lot of go-between, between these two letters. The letter of Jeremiah to the exiles and the letter of Peter to the exiled Christians. A lot of similarities there. So in order for us to get a grasp of 1 Peter, what we need to do is go back to Jeremiah 29 and I will remind you of a couple things that I talked about that will help us.

So the first thing is this. In Jeremiah 29, and actually throughout the whole of scripture, in the narrative, from beginning to end, there are two communities that are prevalent. The first one is the community of God's people. The second is the community of "not God's people." And these two communities are often times at odds. They are infiltrating one another, and dominating one another. So you see this tension throughout scripture, from the beginning to the end, you see these two communities going at it. In fact the fourth century theologian, Augustine, wrote in a book called *City of God*, about this exact thing. He says, "The race of humanity has been distributed into two parts: one, consisting of those who live according to man and the other of those who live according to God. And we so mystically called these two communities, 'cities'. So in other words, what he is saying is, there are two communities that we call cities: the city of man and the city of God.

The city of man is the community of "not God's people". The city of God is the community of God's people. I talked about how, metaphorically, throughout scripture, the city of man became known as Babylon because, when God moved His people from Jerusalem, in exile to Babylon, it was the center of all that is ungodly. It was the heart and soul of the city of man. From that point forward, the people of God began to adopt this metaphorical language, saying, the city of man is Babylon. Likewise, the city of God is known as Jerusalem, both literally and metaphorically. So there are these two cities. You either belong to the city of man or you belong to the city of God. There is no dual citizenship. You are either, or. That's the tension throughout the scriptures.

The second thing that I talked about was how in Jeremiah 29:7, the Israelites were called to seek the Shalom, or welfare of the city. Remember that? I talked about how Shalom is about peace, but more than peace. It's about prosperity, not so much financial prosperity, more like spiritual, emotional, holistic prosperity. Cornelius Planting, Jr. said it like this:

The webbing together of God and humans and all creation and justice, fulfillment and delight is Shalom. It's a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fully employed. A state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder at the creator and savior and opens doors of welcome to the creatures in whom God takes great delight.

So what we see is this. God, in Jeremiah 29 intended to send His people into the heart of the city of man in order to establish a permanent presence there by which He can enact great influence through His people. So what God had in mind was, *I'm going to take my people, I'm going to send them right into the very heart of all that is ungodly and through their presence there, they are going to disseminate influence. They are going to have an impact in that culture and that arena.* We saw that played out in the life of Daniel. He rose to prominence in the Babylonian Empire, and we see God's plan unfold.

So with these two things understood, now we look at 1 Peter where we want to see that living as exiles means that we understand our identity as the people of God and we proclaim the gospel to our host cities.

Two parts: **we need to know who we are**, then **we need to know what we are to do**.

This is important to understand, because we as Christians and especially in this self-help culture that we live in, we rush to action before we contemplate who we actually are. So we need to understand that all actions should be disseminated from, and flowing out of, this understanding of who we are. If you don't know who you are, you don't know how you ought to act. So if we focus only on action, at the exclusion of identity, then we get confusion and everything is convoluted because we don't know if our actions are actually matching what ought to be done because of who we are.

What I am going to say today is this: identity precedes destiny, or *who* you are is first, and second is what you are to do about it. We will see that in 1 Peter.

As I was looking at this, I started to see the similarities of Jeremiah's letter and Peter's letter. I want to show you a couple of these so you can see where I'm going with this.

In Jeremiah's letter, starting in chapter 29:4, the letter is addressed from Jeremiah. He writes, "It is to the exiles whom I, God, have sent into exile." In essence what God is doing is to make sure that Jeremiah gets it explicitly, that what is happening to the people of God is not accidental. Not coincidence. God is doing it on purpose. He knows what He is doing. He wants the people to know this. *I am in control. I know what I'm doing. Trust Me.*

And then when I opened up in 1 Peter 1, looking at verse 1, you see this similarity. I can see how Peter was influenced by Jeremiah. "To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father and the sanctification of the spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for sprinkling with His blood." Peter opens his letter like Jeremiah opens his letter. He says, *you are exiles*. Jeremiah says you are exiles on purpose. Peter says you are exiles on purpose. Do you see what he did? He takes the noun, "exile" and he adds the adjective "elect". What he says is, this is who you are. *You are an exile, but you are an elect exile. Meaning, I know what I'm doing. I have chosen you. I have this under control. You are who you are for a reason, a purpose.* Very similar.

Then we look at a cryptic little phrase at the end of Peter. That is the beginning, let's take a look at the end of Peter, how the book ends. Then we'll go to the middle and we will unpack the content of it. If you look at 1 Peter 5:13, there is this verse that we would easily gloss over. It says, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings. And so does Mark my son." If you look at that verse, you kind of go, yeah, whatever. But if you look at it, there is an unnamed woman, "she", is in Babylon. She is chosen. There is also this guy named Mark. What Peter said is that this unnamed woman and this Mark are sending greetings. They are saying hello. As he is closing his letter, Peter is saying, by the way, she says and he says, hello. How does Peter know that these two people want to say hello to the readers of his letter? How does he know that? It is because he is with them. He is with them.

Peter is with this woman, a chosen woman in Babylon, and he is with Mark. So Peter is in Babylon. What is interesting is, in history, Peter didn't do ministry in Babylon. He was in Rome. What do we do about that? Either Peter is a liar, or something else is going on here. The fact is, he is actually doing something cryptic. He is saying, "I am in Rome, but I am really in Babylon, if you know what I mean." In other words, I am in the place, the seat, the center, of the city of man. I am where ungodliness dwells. That's where I am. I am writing to you, exiles, because I myself am an exile. Just like the Israelites in the Old Testament. I am an exile, you are an exile. We are all exiles. That's where I see a little bit of Peter's influence by Jeremiah.

But it doesn't stop there. Let's keep going. In 1: 17, he says, "If you call on Him (God) as Father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, then you need to conduct yourselves with fear throughout (-- what?) the time of your exile." So in Peter's mind, he is saying, look, I am in exile and you are in exile and we are experiencing exile. I am in Rome, and you are in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), so we understand that no geopolitical boundaries determine whether or not we are in exile. No matter where you are, if you are an exile, you are in exile! That's Peter's argument. I am like you. You are like me. We are exiles.

He goes on to say this (1 Peter 2:11) "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles," the rest of the verse is about what you should do. But notice the beginning of the verse, the first half of that sentence, that first little clause right there, is all about *identity*. Beloved. I urge you AS sojourners and exiles. So I am going to tell you what to do, but my telling you what to do is based on *who you are*. Identity precedes action. You've got to know who you are before you can understand what you are to do. That's his logic here.

So what we learn from this is that in Peter's mind, the plight of the Christians in his day is similar to the experience and circumstances of the exiles of Israel in Jeremiah's time. He is saying you are exiles like they were exiles. You are an exile like they were. I am an exile like they were. What this tells us is that the Christian life is one in which you experience exile. In other words, it is an experience in which you are continually and progressively marginalized. As a Christian, based on your identity, you are pushed to the fringes of society. You are marginalized. It's not because you are weird apart from your Christianity, it's because your Christianity and what you believe about it which results in a particular kind of behavior, has alienated you from the culture in which you live, therefore, you are pushed and marginalized to the outer extreme and fringes of our culture. Peter says that is what it means to be a Christian. You are pushed out.

So not only is the Christian life one that is to be lived at the margins of society, but then we need to understand that being in the margins, being pushed to the fringes of society,

we have to figure out how we are to live in those margins. How are we to live as exiles in this host culture? What are we supposed to do?

When I say host culture, I hope this comes to your mind: the idea of like when you go on vacation or something. You go to a different country or a different cultural area. If you go to Hawaii, it's a different culture. Whatever. For me, when I think about cross-cultural ministry, I think about the times when Sarah Weakley and I would lead teams to Jamaica, and understanding that Jamaican culture is not American culture. So what we would have to do is, we would have to prepare our team ahead of time for what Jamaican culture is like. Because, if you as an American just show up in Jamaican culture, acting all American, you are going to offend the people of Jamaica. So therefore, we have to prepare ourselves ahead of time for the things about Jamaican culture that are to be accepted and embraced, and the things about Jamaican culture which are to be rejected. Unless we prepare people ahead of time, they run the risk of offense toward Jamaicans. Why? Because Jamaican culture is not my culture. I am a temporary resident of Jamaica for that week or two that I am there. Jamaican culture is hosting me. Therefore, I don't have permanent citizenship there, I am just a passer-by. Just somebody who is coming in, and will be leaving soon. With that mentality in mind, we as Christians, we have to realize, are living in a host culture upon this earth. This is not our home! We do not belong here. This is not our permanent residence. (Applause).

So, in light of that, remember, I don't go to Jamaica and just reject everything Jamaicans do, nor do I go to Jamaica and embrace everything Jamaicans do. What do I do? I learn the culture in such a way that I can decipher and discern what is good and what is not good, then I can accept and embrace what is good, and I can reject what is bad. Likewise, we as Christians will not have any influence in our culture, if we just say, this culture is bad! All of it is to be rejected! That's ridiculous. Instead, we have to be people who look upon our culture with discernment and we can see what things in the culture are acceptable and embrace those things, and what things ought to be rejected. That is how exiles live within a host culture.

I hope you are good with that.

So what does a Christian do? How do we live in exile? How do we live within this host culture with the understanding that our true citizenship is elsewhere? Remember, living as exiles means we understand our identity as the people of God. We proclaim the gospel to our host culture. Identity precedes destiny. If you don't know who you are, you cannot act the way you ought to act. Identity is pre-eminent. It is the most important thing.

That's exactly what Peter shows us. He goes through chapter 1, and he lays down all the things God has done, God has caused us to be born again to an imperishable faith that is kept in Heaven for us by the power of God. We are going to receive the outcome of our faith, which is the salvation of our souls which wells up into inexpressible and glorious joy. You're like, YES!

Then in chapter 2, he says, in light of what Christ has done, this is who you are. Then he summarizes all of that in the concluding remarks in chapter 2:9-10. He says, summarizing chapter 1 and the rest of chapter 2 – this is where identity comes in. He says,

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, a people for His own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called

you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So if we are to understand who we are and how we are to behave, when we as Christians engage in this culture, we have to start with who we are. This naturally asks the question, as to the exiles' identity, who am I?

Who am I? This is an important question. How you answer that question determines how you perceive yourself and define yourself in terms of your self-worth. The answer to that question is what you will bank your entire life on. This isn't trivial. This is important. As we are going to see, this identity as a Christian is a blood-bought identity, and it is glorious.

Let's break down these things. There are four things that Peter says are a part of our identity:

- chosen race
- royal priesthood
- holy nation
- and we are God's possession.

Let's go one by one through these.

First, we are a **chosen race**. We as Christians have to realize that we are a chosen race. It's important. Now, 'race' here means this: a kindred, or a collection of individuals of the same kind. So you imagine, it is a collection of all these different individuals who possess the same kindness of each other. So what is the commonality? The commonality of our race is in the adjective, "chosen". The chosenness is what produces the commonality which defines our identity, which means that you as a Christian are not of the white race – you are of the chosen race! You are not the black race, as a Christian, you are the chosen race! You are not the Asian race, you are the chosen race. If you are a Christian, this should well up inside of you with great joy, because that means, as a chosen person, God wants you! He wants you.

Do you know what else this does? It reminds us that in culture, one of the great evils of our culture is racism. What this tells us is that Christians ought to be the least racist people on earth, because our commonality transcends racial divisions. So the enemy Satan himself, wants to fragment the church by creating racial divisions, where this tells us that race is not to be something that divides us, instead, we are to see our race and commonality and be defined by it because we are chosen and wanted by God. (applause & cheers).

We are a chosen race. For some folks who are theologically astute, and they are like, "that guy is preaching Calvinism". I'm not preaching Calvinism, I'm preaching Peterism! Look at it. Of course, he is carried along by the Holy Spirit, so it's Holy Spiritism! We are chosen! God wanted you! And He is going to have you. That's great! That's awesome! I want to be had by God. There is nothing that will satisfy me more, so instead of pushing back with "I don't know about that Calvinism" – I just go, No, no, no! Here's what we need to do. We need to bow in awe of the truth that God wants me. We need to overflow with joy in the fact that God says *I want you*. And I think we need to humbly embrace the truth instead of trying to fit this into one of our mental categories – we need to realize

that we are just finite people. God is infinite. He wants you – so just let Him have you! (cheering).

You are chosen and wanted. That's good. And if you want to leave because I'm a Calvinist, the door is back there.

The second thing is, we are a **royal priesthood**. When you hear the word 'royal' what comes to mind? Royal! Princes and princesses, kings and queens. That's what you are. That's what you are. That's crazy to me! When I think about it, because I realize throughout the scriptures, Jesus is King. He has a kingdom. Now He is calling me royalty. How? How do I get that? I got that, because Romans 8 and Galatians 4 teach me that I have been adopted. Once I was a peasant on the outskirts of God's kingdom and instead, God went out there as King of Kings and He heralded over the fence, "Come in! I am having you to be my child. Come on in!" So I have become a prince of the King, I am a child of the King. If you are a Christian this morning, that is part of your identity. You are not some peasant that God ignores. Instead, you are a child of the King.

As the royalty begins to seep in, you begin to realize you are not only a royalty, you are a **priesthood**! Priesthood implies going into the presence of God. This tells me Jesus is King, and if He is King and I have royalty, then I have His name as my name, and I can kick open the doors of His throne room of grace and I can walk in with confidence, knowing that He won't reject me, He will embrace me!

Are you kidding me?! That means – this is so good. I am a child of the King with full and unhindered and unlimited access to God's presence, where there is fullness of joy. Ooh-Ya! (cheering and applause)

So that's my identity. God wants me. I have commonality with you all because God wanted us. We are children of the Most High God, who is the King of Kings. He has given us a kingdom and we have full access to His throne of grace. Man!

Thirdly (as if that weren't enough! You know what I'm saying?! We can just end there! Strike up the band! Let's go!) The third thing; we are a **holy nation**. This portion I think is essential and I have to explain it a little more because we have a hard time grasping it, but a nation means a multitude of people, who live together but have the same nature or nationality. It implies that we have a common bond of nationality and that implies that we live together and associate together. Now our common bond of nationality is the fact that we are a citizen of a nation which is called "holy". Is there any nation upon God's good earth that can be considered holy? No. So with that truth, I am a citizen of the holy nation, but when I look upon the earth, I see no holy nation. It must mean, then, that my nationality is other-worldly. There has to be a world out there in which I have citizenship, but it can't be this one.

That's exactly what the scriptures teach us. Remember this? Philippians 3:20: "Our citizenship is in Heaven and from Heaven we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies." And then there is something else – I find it really good – when we think of citizenship and country and nationality, it may be you think, maybe the holy nation is Israel? I go – no, check this out.

Let's go to Hebrews 11, and let me show you a little bit from the life of Abraham. According to the author of Hebrews, Abraham is considered an exile. We should perk up our ears! Exile? That's me! So what did the author of Hebrews have to say about Abraham being in exile. Let's check some things out. 11:9 "By faith, Abraham obeyed God." Remember, God made a promise to Abraham, here's some land. I promise it to you. What's it called? The Promised Land. All right. So Abraham left there to receive his inheritance of the Promised Land. He didn't know where he was going, but he just had faith. Remember that story?

Hebrews 11:9 By faith, Abraham went out to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

What was the promise? It was the Promised Land. Then in 11:10. The first word is "for", which tells us it is the "because" phrase, meaning he went out in faith to possess the Promised Land *because* of this verse, which says, "He was looking forward to the city which has its foundations whose designer and builder is God."

So Abraham says, you made a promise to me, the Promised Land. I'm going to get up and go. I'm leaving my home country, I'm going to this land I don't know where it is because I'm looking forward to the city that God has designed and built. What city is it?

Hebrews 11:13 "Now these all died (Sarah, Abraham) in faith. They didn't receive the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having knowledge that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

They knew the Promised Land was theirs and they looked at it from afar, and they were like, I know by faith I'm going to get it, but ... if we're strangers and exiles and we don't get it, we're dead.

Hebrews 11:14 People who speak like this make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return, but as it is, they desired a better country.

My question is: what is the better country? What is it being contrasted with? It's being contrasted with the Promised Land. In other words, Abraham is told, I'm going to give you the Promised Land. He's like, Yeah! Way to go! But then he dies before he gets it. But he went in faith anyway, because he was looking forward to the city which God has designed and built which is a better land than what was promised. What land is that? He clarifies it for us: that is a heavenly one. So what Abraham was looking forward to was a heavenly homeland that God is designing and building which is better than Israel, the Promised Land.

Then it goes on and says, "Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God because (for) He has prepared for them a city." WOW! What city?

1 Peter 3:13 says, "But according to His promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Peter is saying, your hope is not in this world. Your hope is the fact that a new heavens and new earth is going to descend upon this place and in which you have your citizenship. In other words, there is a better country

out there that is awaiting you and that is the new heavens and new earth, which will be inaugurated when Jesus returns.

I love this truth, because Isaiah 65 and 66 promised the new heavens and new earth, and that is what we Christians are longing for and waiting for. In fact Romans 8 even said that creation itself is standing on tiptoe, in anticipation of Jesus' return when he reveals who His sons and daughters are. Because in the revelation of us as sons and daughters, creation itself will be set free, liberated from its bondage to decay, and the creation itself will be renewed and redeemed and restored. New heavens. New earth. You and I are residents of that and we get to be in that forever and ever. That's our *hope* (ie, *assurance*)!

So, when it says we are a holy nation, it means that you need to find your identity in the nation which is holy, which is the Christian nation. But we have looked upon this earth and there is not holy nation here, therefore there is no Christian nation upon this earth, in fact the only truly Christian nation is the new heaven and new earth, which are coming when Jesus comes. Where righteousness and holiness dwell! Phew!

Fourth thing – 1 Peter 2 – we are **a people for His own possession**. This is for me the most endearing thing about what Peter has to say. Not only did God choose us by His own pleasure and sheer grace, He wanted us. He adopted us and gave us access, giving us a new kingdom and a new nation. He is saying all of this is: *I want you to be mine. I want to possess you and I want you to have Me*. The greatest gift God could ever give is Himself. So, in marriage language we might say something like this: God is saying, *I am going to give myself fully to you, and you give yourself fully to Me*. That's what it means to be possessed by God. That's what it means. Full. FULL embrace. That's good.

So if we look at these four things (which I will talk about more next time), summarizing these four things we could say:

We are people who have been lovingly chosen by the sheer pleasure and grace of God, to become His children and heirs of His kingdom, with full and unbridled access to the throne room of God's grace, in whose presence we are made full and joyous and completely redeemed.

That is what it means to be a Christian. Wow! Go home and think about that! If you do, it will change your life.

How did this happen though? Naturally, when we answer the question, "who am I", you get the answer. And you go, well, how do I become this? As non-Christian folks, you would ask yourself the question, well, that's reserved for Christians, so how do I get in on that? We as Christians go, how did I receive that? I think we as Christians have convinced ourselves and fooled ourselves that we have somehow earned this identity! We haven't earned anything! So how DID this come about? This is where we need to put on your thinking caps. (you're probably thinking, oh, Man, I've been thinking hard already! - hey, love God with all your mind!) Let's go:

God has done it. How have we gotten this new identity? God did it. He did it. Let's look at Exodus 19. In the Old Testament, you see Jesus there. God has done the work of attaining our identity in Jesus. Ex 19:5-6 is beautiful:

Now therefore (a conditional statement) If you will indeed hear My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be my treasured possession (treasured possession? That sounds familiar) among all the peoples. For all the earth is Mine, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests (What? That's familiar too – royal priesthood! Interesting). And a holy nation. (Hey, now! This is plagiarism! Peter just plagiarized Moses! This is messed up!) These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

So as the narrative unfolds, we ask the question, did Israel achieve what God had promised? NO. No they didn't. But, remember the conditional promise – “If you do these things, obey My voice and keep My commandments,” If you do those things, then these things are what is going to happen to you. But now Peter says, these things “are *true* of you.” So the only thing we need to think about it is: if these things in the promise of Exodus 19 are true of me as a Christian, then who met the conditions that were able to grant me that identity? Who was it? Jesus. Because Jesus fully obeyed the voice of the Lord. Jesus fully obeyed and kept the covenant.

We see this in Romans 5:19

For by the one man's (Adam) disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the one man's (Jesus) obedience, the many will be made righteous.

The reality is this: you and I have been made righteous or holy because of Jesus' life. Often we say, I've been made holy because Jesus died on the cross for me. That's only partially true! That's true, but it's only partially true. In fact, we've been made holy and righteous because of Jesus' LIFE. The fact is, every command of the covenant, He kept. Every time the voice of the Lord was out there, He obeyed. So He did for us what we could not do – fully being obedient.

That was according to the Law, keeping the covenant. Because we are lawbreakers, it says in Galatians 3 that the curse of the Law has fallen on us, but it also says that Jesus took upon Himself the curse of the Law for us. So *not only did He live for us, He died for us*. Then He conquered death, sin, and evil by rising for us. So I ask the question: how do you get your identity? It's not by you doing anything, it's by Jesus' having done it ALL. (applause)

So, when I look at this truth, I say this: if you are in Christ, then all these conditional promised are granted to you because Jesus has done it for you. It is FINISHED. So we as Christians, we suffer all the time because we think that by our performance we will secure for ourselves that particular identity of Christianity. But if you preach that, you're not preaching Christianity. Instead, we say, Ahh, salvation IS by works – but it's by *Jesus' works*. His works were perfect and they did it for me. So I don't preach myself accomplishing anything or earning my identity, I preach Christ earning for me the identity that I have – Him crucified and resurrected. Christ! There is no room for us to boast. What are we going to boast about? The only thing we could boast about is all the sin we have to be forgiven of! That's it. So boast in Christ.

Then in 1 Peter 2:10, Peter gives the, I will call it the 'rationale' behind how this obedience of Jesus was worked out. I would call it redemption. I happened in Christ, but what He did was redeem us. We can see this because this quote in Peter is from Hosea. It says, “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.” What Peter is doing is paraphrasing Hosea 2, listen to this. Remember, Hosea is a story about Hosea, who represents God,

and Gomer, his wife, who represents God's people. Gomer cheats on Hosea and then they are supposed to get divorced, and they have grounds to, but Hosea doesn't. Instead he redeems his wife. Remember that story? A beautiful story about Christ and His church. God has every right to just disown us, but instead, because of His unfailing love for us, He doesn't divorce us, though He has grounds to. Instead He keeps the covenant and redeems us. I preached on this nine months ago. So now, he says in verse 23, "(Sometime in the future) Although right now you don't have mercy, I will have mercy on you. And although right now you're not my people, I will say to you, 'Not My people', that you are My people." So God makes this promise. In some time in the future, you who don't have mercy – you're going to get it. Those who aren't My people, you are going to become My people in the future.

And then when we turn to 1 Peter 2, we see "You once were not a people, but now you are God's people. You once did not have mercy but now you have mercy." In other words, the redemption that God said is coming to restore a people to Himself, is in Jesus. Because in Hosea 3 – do you know what that's titled? *Hosea Redeems His Wife* or in other words, God Redeems His People. Chapter 3 comes right after that verse. I'm going to do this for you. Redemption! Or God has done this for you. Redemption in Jesus.

Ephesians 1:7-8 "In Him we have redemption through His blood. In Christ, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He has lavished upon us with all wisdom and insight."

It is God's wisdom, it's God's insight that lavishes grace upon us in which we have forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ for the redemption. Beautiful.

If I didn't have a time limit, and you didn't have a limit on how long you can sit, we could unpack that, but we can't. We have to move on.

So exiles' identity: that's who we are, that's how we got it. Now what do we do with it?

I don't want to give it away now, I'll be unpacking this next time.

What is our destiny? Look at this in 1 Peter 2:9: So you are these four things. "So that" – which is the connection which tells us, here is the purpose, or the intention for why God gave you the identity He did: here is your identity SO THAT, or so now you have to go do this. He says, "That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness, into His marvelous light." So the reason why God has granted you this identity, is SO THAT you could go and proclaim how excellent God is, which fulfills the promise Isaiah made in Isaiah 43:21, "That He formed a people for Himself, that they may proclaim His fame (or His glory)." So now we get to proclaim the excellencies of God. Why is God excellent? It's not merely because of what He does. Remember the angels in Heaven are worshipping Jesus, but they are not redeemed by Jesus, so they have a reason other than Jesus dying on the cross, to praise God. It's because God simply is praiseworthy. God is excellent.

- He is excellent because, in His sovereignty, in His freedom, He is not compelled by anything or anyone. He chose us!
- God is excellent because, in His grace He has granted us unlimited access to His presence where previously we were excluded.

- God is excellent because He is holy. He has become the just and the justifier of unrighteous people by coming as Jesus Christ and dying a propitiatory death.
- God is excellent because He has tender love and affection for us and relentlessly pursues us in order that we may be His and He ours.

There are 10,000 reasons and more why we ought to praise God. This is beautiful.

I will end with this. Colossians 1. When I speak in Men's Ministry, I always tell them, this is my favorite verse! This is my favorite verse! They start to think I am lying, because I say that about all the verses, but seriously. This one is really, really good. Colossians 1:13-14 - Here is how Paul would say what was just said by Peter.

He (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

The beauty of that verse! Unspeakable! It means that, at one time we were so dominated by sin, living with citizenship in the city of man that we were enslaved and captive to death and sin and there was nothing we could do about it. It was just raining sin and darkness and evil upon us, and death was waiting. But God invaded earth and He came for us and He looked at all of us who were dominated by darkness, and He set us free. He let us go to the kingdom of His beloved Son, transferring our citizenship from that garbage to the light of His Son, and He set us free. He said, here it is! Sin is gone, you are a child of the king. This is what I have done for you. Redeemed you. Your sins are gone! When you look at the beauty of that! Oh my goodness! (applause) You start to realize – wow – we have a story to tell!

When we as Christians engage the culture, it cannot be, "Culture, you are yucky, I reject you." Instead it ought to be, "Hey culture, look how great our God is."

They go, "How great is He?"

"Listen to the story of what He has done in me." So we don't proclaim the gospel by telling other people in the culture how bad they are. We proclaim the gospel by telling them how great God is. (applause).

As Peter and the Christians of his day were being marginalized by their host culture, Peter writes this letter to encourage them to persevere. The perseverance is rooted in what Christ has done (Chapter 1). And because of what Christ has done, it flows forward into our identity, which is then going to flow into next time, when we talk about, based on what Christ has done and our new identity, how then, ought we to live? It's beautiful.

In order to proclaim the excellencies of God well in our culture, our daily lives have to match our proclamation. What I mean is this: *if we are going to have gospel proclamation, our lives ought to be a gospel demonstration.* That's what has to happen. Because if we proclaim how great God is, but then in our lives, we show that God is not all that exciting, you undermine the gospel. It's like being at a restaurant and eating terrible food and making faces, then somebody says, what should I order? And you say, well this is pretty good. They are looking at you like, I saw your face distort. Doesn't seem like it's very good.

Another way to look at it is simply this: the gospel changes your life. It doesn't just make you a person who obeys traffic laws. We can't get that in our mind, like "The gospel has

change me, now I drive according to the speed limit now.” People are going to say, I do that too. So what? The gospel is unimportant, then.

Instead we say, no, no, God has worked in me such a work that He has transferred me from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son. And how He has done that is, previously I was an addict to the idolatry of acceptance. I went through my whole life, pleading for people to like me. And if they rejected me or didn't like me, then I went into a depressive, catatonic state where I was like, woe is me. But God has delivered me from that in His gospel because He has proclaimed to me that regardless of what I do and how I live, He has fully accepted me and embraced me, based on the conditions that Jesus has met for me. So therefore, I have unlimited, eternal acceptance by God. That is what the gospel has done.

Do you see the difference? (applause)

Our gospel proclamation must match our gospel demonstration. We can't truncate the gospel to mean that now I don't swear. The gospel has liberated me from the idolatry of acceptance and from the idolatry of self-sufficiency. It has humbled me and made me realize that I can be who I am, because God accepts me, not based on my own merits but because of the merits of Christ. That's the gospel.

Our campaign next year is on the gospel!

I'll end with this quote, which I will begin with next time. Theologian, Miroslav Volf (a great name):

When our identity is forged primarily through the negative process of the rejection of the beliefs and practices of the culture, we have to push others away from ourselves and keep them at a distance. But it is only those who refuse to be defined by their enemies, that can actually bless their enemies.

In other words, you and I cannot be as Christians, defined by what we reject in our culture. Because in doing so, you have to say, if someone asks, “Who are you?”

You say, “I'm a Christian.”

“What does that mean?”

“That means I reject that (pointing) , and that, and that's icky, and no, no, yuck and yuck.” The only thing you are doing there is saying, “I am a Christian, so back away. Back away. Jesus loves you, but back away.” It doesn't make sense.

Or you say, “Jesus loves you and wants to accept you. I'm His people.”

“What? If Jesus wants to embrace me, why don't you?”

And so instead of having our identity shaped and forged primarily on the negatives in our culture, we should have our identity formed on the positive affirmations that are found in scripture. So that, as we form our identity on the positive affirmations of scripture, we don't need to resist and reject people. Instead, we can welcome them. As we welcome them, we can bless them. You cannot reject AND bless. You see what I'm doing?

*So, God, help us I pray, because Christians in this culture are being marginalized and rejected and pushed to the fringes, and we ought not to reciprocate that by rejecting others in response. Rather, help us to shape our identity on the positive that the*

*scripture has to say about us, and what Christ has done for us, that we may look upon our culture with empathy, with compassion and with love. And may we be the very people You want us to be, namely Your hands and feet. To herald and proclaim a gospel that is transformative. God, this is beyond our natural abilities, so You must do it. I'm praying, Spirit, do it. Do it in this church. Makes this church a transformative outpost. An embassy of Your grace in this host culture in which we reside. Help us, I pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.*