



1 Peter 2:4-10
Exiles – 1 Peter
“Declaring His Praises”

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As many of you know, we are the middle of a 6-week series in the book of 1 Peter called “Evangelism as Exiles” which comes from a book of the same title that a lot of us in the church are reading. We have a Sunday morning class that ties in with the book and the sermon series as well. And all of this is helping us lay a foundation for our vision of what it means to be a church, to be disciples of Jesus, in our own time and place where, much like 2,000 years ago when Peter wrote this letter, the culture around us is largely not in line with Christian beliefs. **How do we reach the world for Jesus, so people might be attracted to him, when our message is not one that people are seeking out?** The answer to that is at the heart of our vision, and at the heart of this series.

So, a few months ago there was a movie that was released that you might have heard of. It’s called, “Top Gun: Maverick.” How many of you have seen it? We’ve seen it as well. We almost never watch movies in the theater because it’s so expensive, but we did for this one. Some in my family saw it multiple times in the theater. We have since purchased the movie, and so we have all watched it multiple times now. I think everyone in our family has seen it at least 3 times, and one person has seen it about a dozen times. My wife’s goal is to watch it once a month for a year. My mother-in-law has seen it like a half-dozen times. In fact, she’s the one who told us that we had to see this movie. We’ve told people about it as well. We’ve had people over to our house to watch the movie. Any time the subject of “good movies” comes up in a conversation, we all sing this movie’s praises.

Any of you with me on that? We can probably all pick at least one or two things like that in our life – and maybe a whole bunch more than that – and easily tell someone else about it: why we like it, how it has impacted our life, what the benefits are of it, and so forth. Companies call it word of mouth advertising, and every company knows it’s the best kind of advertising there is, as people declare the benefits and joy of whatever it is they’re telling everyone about.

And, while, in the Church, we may not want to think of it as “advertising”...this word of mouth declaration about Jesus is the best way to introduce people to Jesus and grow His Kingdom. And today’s passage has something to say about this, that might help us shift how we think about sharing our faith. We’re in 1 Peter 2:4-10 this morning, and I want to **start with verses 4-8**. This is God’s Word to you and me today.

So, these verses primarily focus on Jesus. **He is the “Stone” that is written of here**. It’s a metaphor Peter uses, though he’s not original. The theme is one we see in the Old Testament, and in fact Peter quotes from Isaiah 8 and 28 and also Psalm 118. They are prophetic words about the response to this “stone” that God will “lay in Zion” which is a metaphor for saying “lay in Israel” or “give to Israel” or “present to Israel.” Something along those lines.

There are two responses to this stone: one of rejection and one of acceptance. Not everyone hears the message of Jesus and thinks that it is good news. Some people reject the message of Jesus. We probably all know people who have done that. Now, that doesn’t mean a change of heart might not come around. It certainly can. Probably there are a number of us here at Rose Hill who at one time in our lives – maybe for a long time in our lives – rejected Jesus. But, the good news of Jesus finally settled in your heart as truly good news – perhaps thanks to a friend or family member, or perhaps because something happened in your life that took you to rock bottom and you had this overwhelming sense of needing God in your life...and through that, God got into your heart. But rejection of Jesus does happen.

Peter then talks about those who accept the message. **Those people are like living stones, being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus (verse 5)**. This includes us, today, who follow Jesus. And to those people this stone, Jesus, is precious. He’s a “precious cornerstone,” even, Peter says.

Probably many of you are familiar with this, but just to make sure: a cornerstone is the stone that is the first one laid when building a building out of stone, and from it all the other stones extend. Down the wall in either direction from that corner, and up from it as well. It’s the key piece in the

building and has to be set just right. In many ancient cultures, when a cornerstone was laid for a building, there would be a celebration. Sometimes offerings were placed on it in that celebration – such as wine or grain or even food.¹ So, the cornerstone, in their day, was a big deal.

And Peter is saying that Jesus is that big deal: Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith and our faith community. He's the one around which you want to orient and build your life. Notice he talks about sacrificial offering. That's cornerstone language with which they would be familiar as I just mentioned. In living out our faith, we make sacrificial offerings for our cornerstone, Jesus. Let's continue on and see where Peter then takes this **(1 Peter 2:9-10)**.

(Sermon Graphic) So, Peter calls them a chosen people – remember, earlier it was Jesus who was the chosen stone, and now we see that those who receive him as the cornerstone of their lives are God's chosen people. And a royal priesthood, a holy nation...God's special possession. So, through Jesus there's a close relationship with God. In fact, in the Christian faith, just to be clear, when you speak of Jesus you are speaking of God, and when you speak of God you are speaking of Jesus. To speak of one is to speak of the other. And then that is also true for the Holy Spirit. They are all God together, the trinitarian nature of the most High God. And that's who we build our lives on and are in relationship with when we receive Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives.

Ok, let's shift gears for a moment. In a company or an organization – like a church – **You can talk a lot about *what* you want to do, or *how* you're going to do something...but the answer to *why* is usually the key to getting those other questions answered right.** Answering this question gets down to the mission, the reason, the purpose of something, which helps ensure that the decisions being made about *what* and *how* are the right ones. A company can decide they want to make a particular product. Great. Why? That question has to be adequately answered. If I tell my wife that I want to buy a new car, she might ask me "why". If I tell her it's because I've always wanted sporty, two-seat convertible and if I get it I'll be fulfilling a life-long dream that will make me happy for the rest of my life, I'm going to have a really hard time getting her to agree with me to buy that car. It's not really

going to make me happy for the rest of my life. So it's a bad decision to make. But I tell her that I've always wanted to buy a sporty two-seat convertible and give it to her...then, I'm going to have a much easier time making that purchase. The answer to the question "why" is always crucial.

And the churches to whom Peter is writing asked that question. Well, maybe they didn't. But he gives the answer to "why" God has brought the church together under the lordship of Jesus anyway. Why does the church exist? Why are they his people, God's possession? Peter says that they are God's special possession "**...that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light**" (1 Peter 2:9). This is why God has built the church, with Jesus as the cornerstone.

The action part for us, of course, is to "declare the praises of God." But we cannot ignore the second half: "who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light." Part of the reason that churches grow stagnant in their evangelism is that the people who are a part of it have forgotten the darkness they were called out of. It's like a movie. Eventually, I'll stop watching Maverick, and a few years down the road, I won't be so enthusiastic about it. In 20 years I might not even remember why I thought it was so good. Unfortunately, this happens in our faith sometimes. We forget how dark the darkness was (and even if our lives didn't "look dark"...being separated from Jesus is dark, and we realize that once we step into his light), and we even sometimes forget how good it is to be in the light.

It is so important to remember how God has touched, changed, transformed your life. It's also important to know that what you remember, doesn't just have to be your initial profession of faith, or baptism, or whatever else are the things that mark the beginning of your journey of faith. It can be what God has done much later in your journey as well. In fact, that's how our journey of faith stays fresh and strong. It's not a movie that's complete. **Our faith is something that God is constantly stretching, building, and shaping, and so there's new things to be joyful about that God is doing.**

About twelve years before I became pastor here at Rose Hill, Gwen was on staff at a church in the area, and she helped plan and facilitate a memorial

service for Claire Willard, the wife of the former pastor of Rose Hill Church, Harlow Willard. At that memorial service, she heard all this great stuff about Claire, Harlow, and the church. She called me that evening – again, this was in the fall of 2000 if I remember right – and she said, “Hey, if Rose Hill Presbyterian Church ever is looking for a head pastor, I think you ought to apply.” Literally a dozen years later Gwen happened to see that Rose Hill was looking for a pastor, because Bill Zacharda, who had been the pastor after Harlow, retired. I was intrigued, thought it could be a good fit for me, so I put my name in the hat. And out of all the candidates they looked at – my understanding is they had 130 or more resumes – they chose me. I know, makes you wonder about the quality of the candidates, right? But that was an exciting thing for us, it still is, and the way God orchestrated it all still amazes me.

You want to know another interesting bit in it all of that, that only God could orchestrate? At that church where Gwen helped with Claire Willard’s Memorial service, Gwen would oftentimes help lead a particular bible study that one of the Associate Pastors usually led. She was his substitute teacher when he couldn’t make it. And before *he* led that Bible study, Harlow Willard led it. You see, after Harlow retired from here, he helped lead a Bible Study at that other church. So, *both* Gwen and I have followed in the footsteps of Harlow Willard.

I mean, you can’t make this stuff up. God works in amazing ways. And those things happened well into our faith – not at the start. Unlike a movie or a restaurant or something else that is usually stagnant, and eventually we move on from it to “the next new thing”...unlike that, God is always working in us, calling us further into his light and further along in our journey of faith. God is never done with us. He is always doing something new in our lives. **God’s fingerprints are on each of our lives, and he has called you forth into his family, you’re part of the priesthood of believers, as a follower of Jesus, and your job is to declare His praises.** Your job, my job, is to declare to others what God has done.

Not just wait and share it when someone seems “open” to Jesus. I love that point in the book by Elliot Clark. Too often, he argues, we wait to tell people

about Jesus until we sense they're open to the idea. And by "sense they're open" what I mean is, we wait until someone sits us down and says, "Would you please tell me about Jesus!" When was the last time that happened to you? I mean, maybe you've had it happen...but my guess is most of us haven't. If we wait until people are "open" then we might not ever tell anyone about the good news of Jesus Christ.

We'll tell them about a movie, or a restaurant, or our favorite musical group, or whatever...and we'll do so without them really asking us for our thoughts or opinions...but when it comes to telling them about Jesus, we wait until they practically beg us to tell them. And so, we never tell anyone.

The root problem is a discipleship one in us. Even more specifically, it's a worship problem. The problem is that we don't see God as worthy of all of our worship and praise, all we've got to give, all the time.

On page 104 of the *Evangelism as Exiles* book, Elliot writes, **"Peter tells us we've been set apart for this special service. We're called to declare God's praises to the world. So, if we're not faithfully proclaiming the gospel to those around us, it's owing to the fact we're not overflowing in praise to God. If evangelism doesn't exist, it's because worship doesn't."** (Elliot Clark, *Evangelism as Exiles*, p. 104)

Declaring his praises means sharing with others our praise of God. Giving God credit for doing the amazing things in our lives, or in the lives of others, and doing so with people who don't even know Jesus. When we do this, it communicates to people that this faith thing is real to us. It's an every day thing. It's important. It's first in our lives. It's not just something we take out on Sundays, then put back on the shelf the rest of the week and keep our minds focused on work, the weather, the news, television shows, movies, a purchase we recently made and whatever else we may talk about and even praise so easily. When praise is always on our lips, as the Psalmist writes of, then we will naturally be telling people about the goodness of God. This is why God has brought you to this place. This is why God has chosen you. We are all part of the "priesthood". We are all "pastors" in this sense. Declaring his praises is not just for professional Christians. It's something for all of us

to engage in. **We are all called to declare the praises of him who has called us out of the darkness and into his wonderful light.**

So, to wrap things up: first...if you have not seen Top Gun: Maverick...you should. It is so darn good. It *is* PG-13 primarily for some language (though I think it could have been worse) and also for the intense military plane scenes.² So that's the pastor disclaimer in regards to the recommendation. But it is an inspiring movie.

But as good as that is: Jesus is even better. He's changed my life, He's changed yours, too, he's sustained us in difficult times, given us hope for tomorrow and an assurance of eternal life because of his death and resurrection. It's all in God's hands, and He will get us through whatever it is we face in this life and the life to come. He does that when we are in relationship with Jesus. That's the message we Christians declare: That Jesus has got this, and the resurrection proves it. So, if Jesus is not lord of your life, I'm telling you: you're missing out. Jesus is remarkable.

If he is Lord of your life, then why not declare that? Why not look for those opportunities to praise God – for how you came to faith, for how you got your house, your job, or for how he's sustained you in painful times. Whatever it is where God has clearly touched you and been with you. Something may even happen this week where you say, “Wow. God really made THAT happen. That's amazing.” Declare that. Share that. Tell someone about it. They don't have to be a believer. But your enthusiasm for what God is doing might just be what opens the door so that they would accept Jesus and build their life on the cornerstone that he is. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.billwarch.com/blog/the-little-known-purpose-of-the-cornerstone/>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornerstone>

² <https://www.pluggedin.com/movie-reviews/top-gun-maverick-2022/>