



1 Peter 1:13-16, 2:11-12
Exiles – 1 Peter
“Visibly Different”

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This morning we are continuing the series we've been in the last few weeks looking at different passages in the New Testament book known as 1 Peter. It is Peter's letter to Christians scattered throughout modern-day Turkey. Like the times we find ourselves in today, they were living in a culture that largely stood in contrast with their Christian beliefs. And so, Peter is encouraging them in their faith, including how they live out their faith so that they might lead people around them to Jesus. Therefore, the series is titled, “Evangelism as Exiles” which is the theme of 1 Peter and is the title of a book we are reading as a church that goes along with the series. There's a class during each hour on Sunday mornings that helps us dig deeper into the book and its themes and the sermons as well. All of this is helping us get into our new vision of what it means to be a church and be a disciple of Jesus.

I was once told by a political speech writer that it's never good to start a speech with a joke. Well, I'm going to ignore that this morning and start with a light-hearted story that helps us get into today's passage and theme. Plus, this is a sermon, and not a speech, so the rules don't apply. 😊

The Pope went to New York and got picked up at the airport by a chauffeur in a limousine. After they got a little way away from the airport, the Pope asked: "Can I ask you a favor?" "A favor for the Pope?" exclaimed the driver, "of course - anything!"

"You know, I hardly ever get to drive, and I'd really like it if I got to drive now. Would you please let me?" The thought of the Pope getting behind the wheel scared the driver - what if he got into an accident? On the other hand, the chauffeur felt that he couldn't say no to the Pope...so he reluctantly obliged and let his Holiness get behind the wheel.

To the chauffeur's surprise, the Pope stomped on the gas, and peeled out up like a maniac! After driving in excess of 100 mph in a 45-mph zone, a police car pulled up behind them and ordered them to stop immediately. The Pope slammed on the brakes and came to a dead stop.

The police officer walked up to the limo, briefly peered through the driver's window, then hurriedly stepped back into his patrol car and radioed his sergeant.

The officer said to him: "Sir, I have a problem."

Sergeant: "What kind of problem?"

Cop: "Well, I pulled over this limousine for speeding, but the limo has someone really important in it."

Sergeant: "Important like... the mayor?"

Cop: "No, no - a lot more important than that."

Sergeant: "Important like... the governor?"

Cop: "Way more important than that, Sarge."

Sergeant: "Important like... the President?"

Cop: "Even more important than him."

Sergeant: "Who's more important than the President? Who is in the car?"

Cop: "I don't know sarge, but I think it might be Jesus, because the Pope is the chauffeur!"

It may be an obviously fictitious and silly story, but it actually sets the table well for our passage this morning, where Peter encourages these first-century Christians to live in such a way that their lives are clearly different from the world: to live with holy lives. The Pope – and I think we can agree with this even though we're not Catholic – the pope is seen as holy. We can have a theological debate about whether he's holier than any of the rest of us or not...but either way, he's a holy man. And Peter encourages his readers, and

now us, to be holy men and women as well. So, let's turn to **1 Peter 1:13-16 and 2:11-12**. These two short sections are our text for this morning and God's word to you and me today.

So, a few things to just quickly note about these verses. **First, in the chapter two verses, we see Peter reiterates that they are "foreigners" and "exiles" in the place where they are living.** We saw this in the very opening of his letter which we looked at in the first sermon a few weeks ago, that they are exiles. This "foreigner/exile" language is not a comment on ethnicity or nationality, but on their spirituality. This is clarified for us in his encouragement to them to "abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul." They are in a culture that has a lot of temptations and opportunities for sin that they're not participating in. So, they're exiles in that way.

Second, we see that they used to participate in those temptations before they came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. We see that in the first passage, in verse 14, when he writes, "Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance." The implication is that they used to give into those desires. And in chapter 4:3, which we looked at briefly a few weeks ago, we see more detail about the kinds of things they used to participate in, and that are still going on in the world around them – "debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." And Peter comments on the fact that they used to participate in that stuff, before Jesus was their Lord and Savior. So, these Christians, prior to their faith in Jesus, were definitely engaging in a lifestyle and activity that was far from being holy or godly.

But the main thing I want to highlight for us from these verses is that: **Holiness stands out. Holiness is different than the world, and people know and recognize holiness when they see it.** Both of these passages admonish the readers to refrain from sinful behavior and instead live a holy life, or a good life as it's stated in the chapter 2 verses. Both are about living differently than the world, because that stands out. A person might not agree with Christian theology, might not be a believer, might not even believe in God. But this idea of holiness, of being holy, of experiencing a holy moment,

or having a holy encounter with someone is something that people recognize, because it stands out from the usual. It's different. Holiness looks and different from what most people tend to experience in life.

What we tend to experience in life, what the culture around us propagates, is generally not holy. I mean, no one is going to call our political climate a holy one; shopping on Amazon or Nordstrom.com may make you feel good – until the bill shows up – but it is not a holy experience; no one is going to call a dance club on Saturday at 1 in the morning a holy place; most of the music made today is far from holy; no one is going to call a football game a holy event – even though there will be more people praying for their team to win the games today than there are in our churches right now. That's *not* to say God can't meet us in those places or that they're beyond the reach of God's Spirit...and it's also not that they're all bad...but generally speaking, they aren't places or situations where holiness is valued.

In fact, being in those places, being out in the world, engaged with people where we live, work, and play is exactly where we should be – but being a *holy* presence there. Being different, bringing the presence of God. Bringing the fruit of the Spirit. Being different from the world in our actions, our words, our attitudes, how we treat others, and in simply living our faith...not being ashamed of the gospel, giving God praise all the time for what He's done and is doing in our lives – as we talked about last week. That's how we can be.

And just to clarify: **“Holy” simply means, “dedicated or consecrated to God.”** In even easier English: “Set apart for God.” This is what we are when Jesus is lord of our lives – we are set apart for him. This doesn't mean we Christians should remove ourselves from the world around us. You can still be set apart for God, you can still be holy, in the midst of people who are living and behaving in unholy ways. In fact, in order to reach worldly people and lead them toward Jesus, we need to be where they are. We just need to make sure we are a holy presence in those places.

There are so many examples of this in Scripture we can look at, that model this for us. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, **“Though I am free and**

belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Paul would hang out with anyone, and get to know them on their terms, for the sake of leading them to Jesus. He brought the presence of Jesus, the *holy* presence of Jesus, into those relationships, so that they might see Christ in him, and profess faith in Jesus.

We can look at the Old Testament as well, to see how people lived for God in the midst of people who were anything but holy. Take Daniel, for example. The book of Daniel takes place in a time when the nation of Israel was under Babylonian rule. They are political and religious exiles – some in their own land, but many carted off to the Babylonian capital and other major Babylonian cities. And in the midst of that, we see Daniel and others standing up for what they believe. They maintained their convictions about their faith, rather than giving in to the pressures to assimilate to the culture and religion of Babylon. They remained distinct from the culture, even as they lived in the middle of it. So, they wouldn't bow to the idols or to the king, as Babylonians were mandated to do, with serious consequences if they didn't. And frequently, their "holiness/differentness" resulted in respect from the Babylonians, right up to the king himself who, in Daniel chapter 6, ultimately issues a decree that the people are to worship the God whom Daniel worships.

Lastly, let's not forget that Jesus himself left a perfectly holy heaven to come to a sin-stained earth. He made his "dwelling among us" (John 1:14). He was the holiest of all holy people, but He hung out with people who were corrupt, who were stained by sexual sin, who were hungry for power and control, and more. In both Matthew's and Luke's accounts of Jesus' life we read Jesus himself saying at one point, **"For John the Baptist came neither eating**

bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man [Jesus] came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’” (Jesus, in Luke 7:33-34). Jesus’ point with the statement was that the people he’s talking to, and their friends and associates, criticized John the Baptist even though he followed all their rules of holiness to an extreme. Meanwhile, Jesus came and actually hung out with everyday people and had a very social life – the opposite of John it would seem – and he is criticized for that. It’s a no-win situation.

But, as Jesus even describes himself here, we see that, holiness isn’t withdrawing from the world. John the Baptist was no holier than Jesus, I think that’s something we can probably all agree on, and yet John is the one who was a recluse. Jesus, the holy one of Israel, the Messiah, God come to us in the flesh to be the perfect sacrificial lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world... *This Jesus* hung out with all the sinners of the world and engaged with them in their homes, and in their courtyards, at their parties, and at their banquets.

But he always brought the presence of God with him. He stood out. He maintained his holiness even as he interacted with people who were far from holy. He always pointed people to their heavenly Father. And that’s how we’re called to be. Peter writes to these Christians and quotes from Leviticus, where God says to the Israelites, **“Be holy as I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 11:45).** Our holiness is a reflection of who God is. Our good deeds, the way we treat others, the respect that we show people, the love that we shower on people...all of this is an expression of our holiness. And holiness like that is visibly different from how the world lives. It’s a life that is marked by the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. A life marked by these characteristics is a holy life, a life that is set a part for God, a life that radiates who God is.

Let me share a quote from Elliot Clark, in his book, “Evangelism as Exiles” and then we’ll wrap this up. He writes, **“Our conduct is critical to our witness as exiles. We must remember that our neighbors are**

watching...they all know if our walk matches our talk. Our extended family, friends, coworkers, and children can all see if our faith is real. And one way God has ordained for them to be drawn to Christ is through the visible, observable testimony of our holiness. They need to see we're different, that we're like our Father, and that our deeds are good. Only then, as we shine before others, will some of them actually see the light" (Evangelism as Exiles, p. 129).

“Our conduct is critical...our neighbors are watching...they know if our walk matches our talk...can see if our faith is real.” When we live just like the world does, and not in a “set apart for God” kind of way, it undermines our witness. It's when we get charged with hypocrisy. *An authentically lived faith* will gain the attention and respect of others, and is the only way to lead others toward Jesus.

So, a couple applications. **First, if your way of life is not marked by holiness, Jesus can completely change that.** Just as the people to whom Peter writes used to be in the dark about Jesus, and caught up in all kinds of worldly trappings that were detrimental to their well-being and leading them away from an eternity with God...if you're currently on an unholy path away from God, Jesus wants to change that. He can get you back in touch with your good heavenly father, who created you and loves you and wants you in relationship with him. This is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, and I invite you to believe in him for the sake of your life here and now, and into eternity.

And then: **Second, we're called to live holy lives for Jesus while engaged with the world, so people would be drawn to him.** I realize that in the end, only God is truly holy. We're not going to be perfect. But we ought to reflect God's holiness into the world a whole lot more than we reflect the world back to itself. We want people to know that God is good, and one way they get a glimpse of that is through our own holiness...our lives that are marked by goodness, distinct from how the world operates. Let's live lives that are holy and visibly different, glorifying God, and pointing people to Jesus, so that the people in our lives might be drawn toward him and into relationship with him. Let's pray...Amen.