

I Am An Exile

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[0:00] Well, as I said, tonight we're continuing our series in the Christian identity. We started it briefly a few weeks ago in the evening, then jumped to the morning to look at the Christian identity as a child.

And now we're back in our evening services with the series, looking at the Christian identity. And I want to begin by asking, what comes to mind when you think of home?

Is it a place? Is it a people? A family? A culture? A community? Is it a feeling of security, maybe?

Or comfort? Or belonging? There's probably all these things mashed in together when we think of home. And that word may fill you with warmth, but maybe for some people it doesn't.

Maybe for some people it brings a dull ache. For something that they once had but was lost. Or something they never had. That real sense of home.

[1:00] I'm sure you'll agree that home is fundamental to who we are. It's core to our human identity, whether we call ourselves followers of Jesus tonight or not. And in Peter's first letter, where we're basing ourselves this evening, he addresses the very important question of where is our home and with whom is our home?

And what does it look like to live as exiles away from our home? These are important questions for us and they would have been very raw questions for the people that Peter is writing to.

If you look at chapter 1 verse 1, he's writing to people he says who are scattered across Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Those are all just locations in what is now modern-day Turkey.

A Christian church that is scattered and persecuted across the ancient world. And as you read on in 1 Peter, you'll see just how hard they were finding it.

Just all the hardship and suffering and persecution they were receiving for their faith. And Peter responds by reminding them of who they are. What's the first thing he wants to tell them?

[2:09] In this letter, he reminds them of who they are. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, verse 1, to those who are elect, exiles.

And that brings us to the aspect of the Christian identity we're going to be looking at this evening, which is that Christians are exiles. I am an exile.

So first of all, our first point rather unimaginatively is called Christians are elect exiles. We're looking at the fact of who we are.

Who we are affects how we live. That's kind of how we're going to work through the sermon. First of all, looking at the who we are and then seeing how we live. You might think of it as a football team when someone puts on the colors of their team that affects which way, how they play.

And they're not going to suddenly start shooting your own goals, you hope. Who they are, their identity affects how they live. And that's how we're going to look at this. First of all, looking at who we are as exiles and then the implications for us in that.

[3:13] When Paul says that the Christian is an elect exile, you might say he's giving us the last attitude and longitude of the Christian life. He's helping us locate who we are as Christians in this world.

In relation to God, Paul says we're elect, chosen in chosen by God in Christ, made God's special people destined to inherit an eternal home.

So elect in relation to God. And it follows them that in relation to the world, Christians become exiles are people whose home is no longer in this world and who will so then be treated as outsiders and live as those who are just passing through.

And while we're going to principally focus on our identity as exiles, I want to just mention what it, that election element, because I hope you'll see that it flows, being exiles flows first and foremost from the fact that we are elect, the fact that we are chosen by God.

Remember Paul is Peter rather is writing to Christians whose daily experience of suffering is telling them that they don't belong here. And they're experiencing oppression.

[4:24] They're experiencing their daily experience in life is that this is where I don't belong. Now that might not be how we all go through life.

Sometimes we can have, sometimes we can very much feel like we belong in a place. But for the people that Peter was writing to, they really knew that this is where they didn't belong. And so you imagine then what a comfort and a relief it would have been to read Peter's words for Peter to, to confirm for them.

Yes, you know, the reason you don't feel like you belong, the reason that you're being ostracized, the reason that you're being pushed out by friends, by family is because you don't belong.

And it's blocked because you belong somewhere different and somewhere better because you're chosen by God because you're elect in Christ. Just as an aside, I don't know whether that's a comfort for any of us, whether I don't know whether we're experiencing any of the kind of persecution the church was experiencing them, but maybe as we feel pushed out of a friendship group, or as there's tension and maybe just some ridicule from family who don't believe in Jesus, we feel ourselves rubbing up against the world.

Well, Peter's explaining that's because you don't belong here. Peter's making sense of our experience. Peter says Christians are elect.

[5:51] And it's a wonderful comfort because not only does he say you're elect, but he says you're elect because God has chosen you. Look at the language, just look at the way he explains that in verse two. He says, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, so they're elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Over the past two weeks, we've been thinking about the Christian identity as a child of God. And Peter would say that you being a child, if you're trusting in Jesus, wasn't it afterthought?

That before the beginning of time, before you were ever imagined by your grandparents, before you were ever brought into the world by your parents, before time itself, God chose to place his love upon you as his people, as his person, as his child.

He's a triune God, set his love on me and on you if you're trusting in Jesus this evening.

Granting it, none of us deserve that love by nature. The Bible is very clear that because we've all sinned, we all deserve God's wrath, not his fatherly love. But verse three, Peter reminds us, he says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, how have we received this blessing?

- [7 : 06] Well it's according to his great mercy. He has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- When God elects someone, he doesn't do that because of anything that they will do or have done but purely because of his mercy and grace.
- If you're here as not as a follower of Jesus, can I just say, can I encourage you to just think about what Jesus is offering? Even before we see that second half of being elect exile, what Peter is saying is that those who belong to Jesus, they are God's people.
- And they have been chosen by him and loved by him since the foundation of the world. Isn't that something you want? Isn't that a security you want to have?
- Back to our passage though, that phrase, through Christ, that we get at the end, born into a living hope through Christ is key. It's key to understanding all the privileges and trials of being an elect exile.
- [8 : 11] You might think of it, the question is bound up with Christ. That's what it means by being elect through Christ. So just as in verse 20, Jesus was foreknown.
- So also the believer is foreknown. Just as Jesus faced suffering even unto death in this world, so the believer who is in Christ suffers.
- But most importantly and most gloriously, just as Jesus rose from the dead, so the believer in Christ will rise from the dead. It's an arch, the person who's in Christ follows Christ in that arch of suffering to death to life with him.
- You might think of it like the Christians, like someone in a roller coaster cart. I've actually never been on a roller coaster, so I'm just saying this theoretically. But when the cart goes down, you go down. When the cart goes up, you go up.
- And it's the same if we're in Christ. We belong to Christ. We die with him. But as surely as we die with him, we'll also live with him. The Christian arc follows the arc of Christ's life.
- [9 : 16] That's why Peter says your faith and your hope are in God. And as Peter traces the arc of the Christian life besides Christ, he tells us the consequences of being elect.
- And that is that we are exiles in this world. Just to be clear here, Peter isn't saying to his readers, choose to be exiles. You're elect, therefore choose to be exiles.
- He's saying because you have been chosen by God, because you belong with Jesus, you don't belong in this world. Your exiles in this world, whether you like it or not, it's an objective fact.
- And across one Peter, he unpacks this argument. And I'd like to suggest three ways in which we are, in which followers of Jesus are exiles.
- First we're exiles in terms of place, where we belong. Second in terms of people with whom we belong. And third in terms of priorities, the mindset that we have.
- [10 : 17] So people place priorities. First in terms of place. The Christian is an exile because the world is not their home. For many of us, the word exile probably reminds us of in the Old Testament where God's people were exiled, taken out of the land of Canaan because of their rebellion against him.
- And while there are some helpful similarities there, there's also some really important differences. The Christian isn't an exile because they've, as a direct result of their sin.
- You might say that we're exiles because we live in a world, in a world that is separated from God because of original sin. But we're not exiles as a direct result of sin.
- We're exiles because we're elect. The second difference though is that our inheritance is not on this earth. So Israel were exiled from the land of Canaan and that land, that physical piece of grass and turf and mud, that was their home.

We're exiles not from a physical place. And Peter makes this point when he, in verse four, he says, we've been born again into a living hope and he says through Jesus' resurrection from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

- [11:40] In other words, the Christian inheritance isn't a physical piece of land. It's not a nation state that Christians need to fight to defend. It's indestructible and it's kept in heaven until Christ comes again to make all things new to bring about his new creation.

Other writers such as Paul to the Philippians speaks about how a Christian is a citizen of heaven. Their citizenship, their passport isn't in this world, but it's in heaven.

We belong with Christ. We belong in the new creation because we are one with Christ. And while there's a real and glorious way in which Christ is with us by his spirit, there is still, well, there is still very much, there's still a separation.

There's still a unity, a felt oneness with Christ that we're yet to experience, that we're longing for Christ to return so that we are with Christ where we belong.

We shouldn't then think of ourselves as exiles that have been kicked out of a country. Think instead, when you think of a Christian as an exile, rather think of the exiled church like a bride who has received citizenship in another country.

- [12:54] Like I had a friend who was getting, got married or was engaged to someone from Canada. And in order to be married, in order to go and live with them, they first, they needed to get a green card to be able to live there.

And eventually they got citizenship to live there. But for a while they were separated. For a while they were living in different, for various reasons. They were living on different sides of the Atlantic.

But for that, for my friend who was, who had at one point then citizenship in Canada, but was yet to join a spouse, that's in some ways what it was like for her to be exiled.

She had received citizenship in Canada, but she wasn't living there. That's where she belonged. But that's not where her home was at the moment. In the same way, we have received citizenship in heaven with Christ.

That is where we belong. We would belong as the bride of Christ with him, but we're not there with him yet. That's not where we find ourselves right now as we wait for him to return.

- [13:59] But the great encouragement is that, that inheritance is going nowhere. Peter says it's under-voiled, under-filed, imperishable, unfading. And that's a great encouragement for us because as elect exiles we feel the brokenness, the transience, the way this world passes away, the way it rusts and everything just degrades.

But Paul says your inheritance won't. Elect exiles may lose their earthly possessions. They may lose their livelihoods. They may, as the Peter's readers face such serious persecution that they even lose their lives.

But Peter says you're not going to lose your inheritance. You may be kicked out of the country where you live, but you're never going to lose that inheritance where you belong, that home that Christ has preserved for you.

The believer is not only kept, the inheritance is not only kept safe for the believer, but verse 15, the believer is kept safe for that, and that's not verse 15. Verse five, the believer is kept safe for that inheritance, Peter says you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation yet to be revealed in the last time.

A Christian as an exile doesn't belong here. They belong in their home with Christ, and they are guarded, and that inheritance is guarded until they're brought together when Jesus returns.

[15:32] The challenge then for us is to ask, do we view this world as Peter views it? Do we view this world where we live, our homes, our careers, our bank balances, our five-year plans, our bucket lists?

Do we recognize that this world isn't our home, that this is all perishable, that this is going to fade away? This church building, Carloway, Scotland, they don't last.

Nations will crumble, plans will fail, nations will rise and fall. Our home, our inheritance, isn't any physical piece of land.

Isn't this land, it's not a perfect family or a comfortable retirement? As the writer to the Hebrew says, here we have no lasting city, we seek the city that is to come.

Our home is not on earth, but in heaven with Christ. So that's, we're exiled in terms of place. Second, we're exiled in terms of people. Who are your people? That's a question you often hear.

[16:34] I arrived in Lewis and everyone wants to know who my people are and I think they were disappointed to find that there are no other pickets. I don't think there's any other pickets in Lewis. There may be in Scotland, but no one knows of them.

I come as a person who is completely unattached. You can't dig into my past. You can't dig into my family's history. But who is your people? That's the question people long to know.

People love to connect people and find out who they belong with. And that's what Peter wants to, as well as thinking about place, Peter wants us to think about people.

Who do we belong with? Look at verse 18 with me. Peter says that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish.

As a people who've been bought by it with the blood of Christ, Christians no longer belong to this world. They no longer belong to their people, even as we might say.

[17:43] They've been moved from one family, that of our forefathers, and Peter says their futile ways. And we don't normally think that sounds dishonorable.

But he says, the way of your forefathers, that's a futile ways. And instead, you've been transferred into another family, that of your heavenly father, which is the church.

Now I know there's really, one of the great things about Lewis is how deep kinship and family lies in people's identity.

But one of the challenges that Peter puts forward to us is that actually a deeper kinship, a deeper identity than physical blood that runs through your veins from the people you are descended from, is the kinship and family that you have in Jesus Christ with those who have been saved by him.

And those are the people that Peter says you ultimately belong with. You could say in some ways that the 60 year old person, I mean the 60 year old lady from Lewis has more in common with the 16 year old boy from India who's a Christian than with their non-Christian family.

[19:05] That's what Peter's trying to get across. That who we belong is ultimately, the Christian belongs with the people of God.

All of them they belong with, anyone else at all. And Peter emphasizes how different the Christian is in a number of ways. Later on in chapter two he says he describes the Christian as all the church.

He says you are a chosen race of royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Now chosen race, royal priesthood, people of his own possession, those are all titles that God gave Israel. But now Peter is applying them to the Christian. He's saying all of those, that special promise, blessing language that God gave Israel, that is yours if you're trusting in Jesus.

Just as Israel was set apart from all the nations because of those privileges and those promises. So the Christian is set apart from everyone who isn't in Christ, who isn't trusting him by the promises, by the seal, by the identity that Jesus gives us.

[20 : 20] And in that new relationship in Christ that affects, that new identity in Christ then cuts through humanity you might say.

Earlier on in chapter two Peter emphasizes how since Christ is the cornerstone he becomes the watershed of humanity. Think of a mountain of redger, drop of water falls onto the ridge and it can go one way or the other.

And Peter says it's similar with Jesus. People will either relate to Jesus, this cornerstone, will either see him as a stumbling block and reject him, or they'll embrace him and build their lives upon him.

All of humanity will respond in just two ways to Jesus. There's no middle way, there's no sitting on the fence. Humanity is divided in two by Jesus.

That's the reason why the six-year-old lady from Lewis has more in common with the 16-year-old boy in India who's a Christian than her own flesh and blood. It's because of that dividing line in how we respond to Jesus.

[21 : 25] I think that's really important when it comes to recognizing with whom we belong. As I said in Lewis we love to place who are your people. Do we ever think of our Christian family in that way?

When someone asks who are your people, maybe the first thing that needs to pop into our heads is our brothers and sisters who have been saved with us in Christ.

It's easy to think I belong with my family, with my friends, with those I went to school with, with my colleagues. We have so many things that we have in common with people who aren't trusting in Jesus.

Awfully, we may seem very similar, but the problem is that the dividing ridge of Christ cuts through humanity. It divides humanity. That's nothing, that's not giving the Christians anything to boast about.

It's just that people are divided in how they respond to Jesus Christ. Those who are elect exiles having accepted Christ and everyone else having rejected Jesus.

[22 : 35] The question then is not just do we believe that, but do we live like that? Do we treat our church family as second class family, as the kind of in-laws we don't really want to see, but have to see at Christmas?

Or do we embrace our church family as the people we belong with in Christ? After all, we're going to be with them for eternity.

The difference between Christians and between Christ's family and the world becomes more apparent when we think of our third point. You've thought about exiles in terms of place, in terms of people. Let's consider priorities.

Again, Peter encourages his readers to prioritize serving Christ. He says he speaks of living in a way that pleases God rather than gratifying the old sinful desires.

There's to be a complete change, not when there's a change in allegiance in terms of not rejecting Christ, but accepting Him. What should follow is a change in priorities, not living in a way that is against Christ, but living for Him.

[23:38] Peter describes how that new life will alienate a Christian. He says in chapter 4, verse 3, for the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry, with respect to this, they are surprised that you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you.

Peter says that if you're following Jesus, the watching world will see that you're on exile because they will see that you live differently. Exiles aren't invisible exiles.

The world will notice when we live as if we belong to Jesus Christ. We probably will feel that alienation, especially the more we grow as Christians, the more we grow as Christians, the more our priorities are aligned with Jesus's priorities, the more we're going to find ourselves rubbing up, contrasting, clashing even with the values and priorities of this world.

I probably noticed that most each time I returned to my family in Wales and I see how putting my trust in Christ has set my life on a completely different course to my friends in school, not just in not just the fact that I'm in ministry, but in the things that I'm living for, the things that where my hopes are, my dreams, I don't know whether you find the same thing.

Living our lives on Christ will be counter-cultural. It will mean that we have different priorities as elect exiles. There will be times when the world, the way the world lives and the way the Christian lives, will overlap and the world will approve of Christian values at that point.

[25:28] They'll say, this is brilliant. They'll even be attracted by godliness, but the moment, you'll know that you're on exile because the moment that following Christ moves outside that overlap, that overlap of shared values, the world, Peter says, the world will malign you.

The world will push you back. As the prevailing culture in Scotland and in the UK increasingly moves away from God's word, we're going to experience that alienation more and more.

That alienation is going to become more and more apparent as we realize that we don't belong to this world. We need to remember in some ways like Daniel and his friends in Babylon that we don't, that we live in Babylon, you might say.

Our place is with Christ. Our people is the church. Our priority is serving Christ. So we don't belong in this world.

We're exiles. That's really just a glimpse at our identity as exiles. How does it affect the way we live? You'll be happy to know that our second point is a lot shorter.

[26:35] I just want to focus on three imperatives that Peter gives in verses 13, 15, and 17. Exiles, so we're not only our identity as exiles, second exiles live for their eternal home.

That's how you might summarize all of these imperatives. The first command there is in verse 13. Peter says, therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, exiles are to be future focused. Part of recognizing that we don't belong in this world and that we belong with Christ means that our attitude, our attention needs to be focused on the world to come.

It's that mindset of that bride waiting to go to Canada to be with her husband. That's the kind of mentality we need to have, not satisfied with now, but looking forward to what is to come.

There may well be a number of people here who've been themselves separated from a spouse or fiancé for a long time or for a period of time.

[27:51] People understand the pain, the longing to be together after maybe weeks or months apart. I know some people are on the rigs for several weeks. I know some people might have to go away for several months.

That's the kind of longing a Christian should have. Because we belong with Christ, there's an ache, there's a longing to be with Him. That should fix our minds.

That should give us that future focus. For such single-minded focus to be ours, notice Peter says, set your mind fully on the hope that is to come.

Fully rules out any alternative hopes, any additional hopes. Anything else that is will distract us from the return of Christ. I think that's where the real challenge is for most of us.

We might think, yes, I'm looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ, but at the same time our minds can become so distracted and consumed by all the other things in this world.

[28:50] The desire to make a perfect home, to get a promotion to see our children or grandchildren succeed, whatever it might be. Day by day, it's like we're going through a bizarre and there's hundreds of things being put in front of us that will block out the view of Christ and stop us fixing our eyes on Him.

Life is not like a neutral wilderness. Life as an exile isn't like a neutral wilderness. It's like this salesman constantly trying to take away our attention, constantly trying to make us look somewhere else other than Christ.

That's why Peter says, set your hope fully. Prepare your mind for action. Literally gird up the loins of your mind. I won't go into describing what that means. But anyway, it means focusing fully on Jesus' return.

Later in chapter five, verse eight, people will say, be sober minded. Why? Because the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. It's definitely not a neutral journey.

There's not only going to be distractions, but Satan will be out to distract us, not just distract us to rip our gaze away from Jesus.

[30:09] So following on from having a mindset that is fully set on Jesus Christ, Paul said, the second imperative is be holy in all your conduct. Exiles are to be holy like their Father in heaven because they belong with Him.

We live not for the place where we are, but for the place where we belong. It's like people, if you go to another country, you don't necessarily suddenly imbibe all of those cultural values.

You're probably still going to act like someone from Calaway. And in the same way, we need to act like citizens of heaven. That needs to be to shape how we live.

And Peter says, it's being holy like our Father that will shape how we live. In fact, Peter says, holiness should be increasingly natural to us as exiles.

Verse 14, he says, as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. Peter's reminding us that that's what we were.

[31:12] Our lives were, we used to live exactly the same to everyone else in this world. But no longer should your life fit into that mold.

No longer should our lives fit into that cookie cutter because our lives have been changed. It should now fit into that mold of Christ as He shapes us and makes us fit what we are made to be, what we are created to be.

And that command, be holy as your Father is holy, is not just a command, it's a promise. The Christian exile can hope to be holy as God is holy because they have a heavenly Father who is holy.

The heavenly Father who promises by His Spirit to transform us to be more and more like Him. It's not just a command, it's a promise.

But even Paul knows that such holiness will rub up against the world. Down in chapter 2 verse 11, he says, beloved I owed you as a sojourner and exiles to abstain from the passion of the flesh which war against your soul.

[32:20] The call to holiness, you might say, is a call to war. While we're saved from sin, as a Christian, we'll continue to feel the desires, the temptations to sin and we'll have to fight against that.

Part of being an exile is experiencing that battle, that war within us to live, to be holy as our Father is holy, but also battling against that sinful nature to live like this world.

There's a first two imperatives. Final imperative is in verse 17. Paul says, and if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

You might think that that's the same strange one to add, conduct yourselves with fear. But Peter is saying that the fact that God is our Father, not just our Father, but also our judge, should give us motivation to live for the world to come.

When he talks about the fear of God, he's not talking about fear of God as a bully or as an irritable boss who we fear, but rather fearing the displeasure of someone who we love and who we don't want to let down as it were.

[33:37] It's a reverent fear of God as the creator of the universe that should motivate us to live like our heavenly Father. Peter says, knowing that God is the impartial judge, should motivate the life of the exile that will have to give an account for every thing that we have done.

It's easy, and I think that's helpful, because what's one of the things that makes us most want to live not as an exile, but as a citizen of this world? It's probably the opinion of others.

We constantly feel the pressure and judgment and questioning of what do other people think of us? Peter's reminding them that God their Father is the only judge that matters.

His opinion is the only one that matters. That should help us to remember that it's his verdict that counts, not what people think of us in this world. We'll all have to give an account for our lives, but that's not a reason to fear, because as Peter says, he's reminded us from the beginning, we're elect, we belong with Christ.

It's not knowing that God is judge, isn't something to be afraid of, but something to look forward to as he says, well done, good and faithful servant, as the believer goes to be with Christ.

[34:59] It's just a ransom. We see in verse 18, that's the hope of the Christian. We conduct ourselves with fear, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, but we were ransomed.

That's the hope of the believer, knowing that we have been ransomed. We've been saved from sin to belong with Christ, and so that's why we set our hope on Christ. It's that hope I want to end on, because the hope of the exile is the end.

All the other things we talk about with in terms of the Christian identity, those are fixed. The Christian is a child, now and for eternity. The Christian is a sheep, as it were, will always be part of God's flock.

The Christian will always be a branch attached to Christ. They will always be an athlete running for him, but only in this life will we be in exile.

This is a temporary part of the Christian identity. It's a vital one that we get our heads around, but it's temporary, because when Christ comes again, then our exile will end, and then we'll be at home with him, because then the dwelling place of God will be with man, and then we'll be home.

[36:17] That's great.