

We belong, but not here

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[0 : 00] I just spotted Nick wearing what's got to be one of my favourite t-shirts of his. It says, Due to unfortunate circumstances, I am awake. So I just want to kind of repurpose that and! say, due to fortunate circumstances, hopefully you are all still awake. Right? It'd be great if you could stay that way. It will help if you have a Bible in front of you. Just open up to 1 Peter 1 and have your finger in there. So we're starting in 1 Peter, as we said this morning. And I wonder if you can tell me what you think the significance of this number is.

Some of you smarty pants will be thinking, Ah, it's a church. I know what that is. I know that's the 12 apostles, isn't it, Johan? No, it's not. No. And now you're thinking, I'm a Bible scholar. I know what that is. It's the 12 tribes of Israel, isn't it, Johan? No, it's not. And then some of you who know our teenagers well, you're thinking, that's the number of biscuits they're all going to eat after. It's not that either. Actually, 12 is the number of Christians who die every day in the world for doing what Christian and Zach have just done this morning. 12. And that is a conservative estimate. They're being careful with that number. Now, when you stand up for Jesus, it is going to cost you something.

In this country, it might cost you friends. Or possibly, in really difficult circumstances, it might cost you your job or some money. And that's inconvenient, isn't it? And it's stressful.

But in other countries, it will cost you your freedom or maybe even your life. As we know now, Christians are the single most persecuted group worldwide. So that's Christians. But even if you're not actually following Jesus here this morning, then the world is still a pretty stormy place, isn't it? As we look at the news, what's going on there? What's your anchor? What is it that keeps you going in those circumstances? And I guess if you are a Christian, then why even bother being one? Well, this bit of the Bible tells us what we need to know. It's what you guys need to know, Christian, Zach. It's what all of us who follow Jesus need to know. Actually, it's just what all of us need to know. Full stop. And the message of this part of the Bible, Peter's letter to the churches in Asia and Turkey, is really simply this. If you follow Jesus, you belong, but not here. And so Jesus will give you grace to get home. And as he's telling us that,

Peter wants to just remind us first about who we are in Jesus. Now, I'm hoping that there are some folks here who love their mum and dad. Okay, I'm not going to get you to stick your hand up, but I'm thinking there are probably some people here who love their mum and dad. All right, I love my mum and dad. But at some point, I realized that actually, my mum and dad didn't choose me.

[3 : 22] You ever had that realization? I mean, I'm guessing, kind of hoping that they chose to have a child, that I, you know, that wasn't an accident. But would they have chosen me? They didn't know they were getting me, did they? Maybe actually looking back on it, they would have chosen someone else, given what they got. It's not like that with God. God does choose us. What does it say here, 1 Peter chapter 1? Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, which means he lived and studied with Jesus, and he died for him. To God's elect, we are chosen. Peter says, if you are in Jesus, you are elect.

Elect just means chosen, like people choose a child to adopt. If you read on a little bit further, this letter is written, verse 2, to those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Foreknowing just means God knew you before you knew him. If you actually go to the Greek word, the Greek word is one that we know. It's prognosis. We know that word, don't we? So here's a question for you. What is the prognosis if you're pregnant? Okay, it's not a rhetorical question, guys. What is the prognosis if you are pregnant? Do I really need to go to a doctor to tell me?

Dr. Matt, what's the prognosis if you're pregnant? Yes, you're going to have a baby. That's what it means if the prognosis is that you're pregnant. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knew that you were

going to be born before you were born, and they were busy sorting out the adoption so that when you arrived, they could take you home. Christians are chosen. What that all adds up to, really, is that Christians belong. We belong with God. We belong to God. We belong in his family. We are of his kingdom. Why? Because God said, I chose you. I choose you. And nobody contradicts God. We belong. Do you ever feel like you don't belong? Have you ever had that feeling? I was in order shot on Saturday. I saw a new shop. Soft play for dogs. I saw that, and I thought, I don't belong here.

[5 : 55] And I have a dog, right? I still don't think I belong there. Have that feeling sometimes, don't we? We don't belong. Go back to verse one again. We are God's elect, but we are also exiles, scattered throughout the provinces. We belong, but not here. You see?

And we're scattered as a result of that. And God's people are. They're scattered all over the world, in all kinds of different places. Do you ever feel scattered? That's a thing, isn't it? When you feel scattered. If you haven't yet, don't worry, you will at some point. You'll feel scattered.

But if we're in Jesus, if we're scattered, then one day, we will be gathered. See, we belong, but not here. Can you see what that means?

It means that all those bits of your life where you feel like you belong somewhere better, deeper, truer than here, all of those bits of your life, they are part of you and what God is doing in you, if you're following him. And it also means that all of those bits of your life where you feel scattered into a million pieces, completely dislocated, like you don't belong, all of those parts of you are really part of you and are part of God's plan for you. All of it is meaningful. None of it is accidental. We belong, but not here. That explains why we feel like we don't belong and why Christians are treated like we don't belong sometimes. When we get a letter like this from our Heavenly Father, Christians, we know we will always belong. We will always be loved by God. And that's what makes us significant. Not making it big, not campaigning for change, not having a family, not finding true love.

The fact that we will always belong, we are always loved by God. And if you remember that, if you remember that, Zach, Christian, you won't be worrying about chasing likes on social media or having the best career in the world. We won't be worried, will we, about the next redundancy round.

[8 : 21] We won't be worried what will happen when we turn up to work one day and we say, do you know what, actually, no, I can't do that. Or when we go out with our friends and we say, that's not for me.

We won't be constantly peddling under the surface to mask how we really are, our mental health, if we know that we belong. And, friends, if we bear that in mind, that we belong but not here, then we will see clearly enough not to cover our sin with a convenient label.

I love doing this kind of thing. You're probably all thinking, why is there a huge bag of balloons in the corner?

Well, it is a celebration, but that's not entirely the point. OK, and you're going to have to bear with me. I really hope this illustration works. Otherwise, I would have gone to a lot of trouble for nothing. What's the difference between Christians and everybody else?

Well, nothing really. We all look the same, don't we? We all live in the same bag. The only difference is that God, according to verse 2 of our passage, chooses to fill us with his Holy Spirit so that when we finish life here, some of us will rise.

[10 : 00] Do you see? Feel free to grab one of those. I'll be impressed if you can get that one. The Holy Spirit fills us, and so we rise.

Why? Because we belong, but not here. And that Holy Spirit, by the way, is offered to anybody who will receive him. Here's a question then for us all to consider.

Talking about exile, being scattered, death is the ultimate exile, isn't it? Cut off. The ultimate scattering. So when that comes, will you be gathered in?

No. So how do we live now? We know we don't belong here, but we do belong.

How do we live now? Well, we live in the light of that. What does that mean? Okay, well, I'm going to say something that might surprise you. If that surprised you, this may surprise you too.

[11 : 10] I'm going to say that you are all very obedient people. God knows it. You live obedient lives.

Of course, the question is, obedient to what? Here is how people in Jesus who belong but not here are supposed to live.

Verse 2. This letter is written to those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Saw that in action in the balloons. To be obedient to Jesus Christ.

In other words, if we belong to Jesus, we follow him. We don't follow our hearts. We don't follow what's fashionable.

We don't follow the world. Because we're not adopted into that family. We're adopted into his. We belong there, don't we? We're obedient to Jesus. So if Jesus doesn't turn right, we don't.

[12:12] And if Jesus doesn't turn left, we don't. That's what it means to be a disciple, isn't it? We follow him. Friends, if you are following Jesus today and you have any other impulse in your life to turn right or left when he doesn't, kill it.

Even if it takes you a lifetime of struggle and prayer to do it. Because we're to live in the light of the fact that we belong but not here. This is what Eugene Peterson calls lovely phrase, a long obedience obedience in the same direction, in the direction of home, following the Lord Jesus. Now if you do that, if you live in the light of the fact that you belong but not here, you're going to stick out. Zach, Micah, you need to be ready to not, sorry, Zach and Christian, you need to be ready to not belong.

because it will be easy to blend in. It always is. Easy to go with the crowd, not say the controversial things, duck out of the difficult conversations, choose the comfortable life.

Only if you know that you are in exile, that you don't belong here. Only then will you have the courage to face rejection and maybe even pain for what is right.

[13:38] I'm just going to play you a video clip to show you what the danger is of not doing that. Again, really hoping this will work. One more click. No! Captain.

Captain. Captain. Captain. Captain. The End The End

The End And peace, peace in the Bible is the well-being that only your maker can give you.

It's the wholeness of Eden. So why does Peter put that right at the beginning of this letter? Because this is just his introduction, isn't it? Because he knows that grace and peace is what we need to keep going when things get tough.

Grace calls us, grace saves us, grace empowers us, and peace protects us. Friends, you can't give that to yourself. You can't give yourself that grace and peace.

[17:00] And here, look, it's in abundance. It means grace be multiplied to you, not kind of just about enough to get by. It means overflowing out of you so that you can do things you otherwise could not humanly do.

That's what Peter's saying. Just want you to close your eyes for a minute. Don't worry, I'm not going to come and lift your wallets while I'm not looking. Close your eyes. Now just imagine that you've won the lottery.

Okay, actually, take a step back. Imagine that you have no problem with gambling, right? And imagine that you are okay to spend the price of a loaf of bread on a Euro and millions ticket. And now, now imagine that you've won the lottery, right?

Hold on to that feeling. Now imagine that you've just won it again. And tomorrow, you'll win it again. And in the end, you won't even have to enter because they'll see you coming and they'll just hand over the money. Can you imagine that? That is what this is.

[18:09] God's millions for our pennies. Over and over. That's how we should feel about God's grace and peace multiplied to us.

It's not earned. It's not achieved. It's just received. And then overflowing out of your life. Into your relationships. Into your work. Into your world.

Jesus will give you that grace. To get you home. Most of us in this world aren't interested in Jesus, are we? Let's be honest.

I think it's because we believe, basically in the West, especially in the South, that we already have everything we need. And if there's something that we want, well, eventually we could probably get it. Or, we'll be fine without it.

We don't really think we need Jesus. So what I'm going to say next is going to make me stick out for Jesus. The truth is that without this grace, without God's grace, I have absolutely nothing of eternal value.

[19:17] Just think back to how you feel, how you felt when you were thinking about the lottery. Get really excited about that.

If you got really excited, then just ask yourself the question, what is my life obedient to then? If I got really excited about winning the lottery. In fact, let's just spend a moment thinking about that question.

What voices are we obedient to? Is it anything as good as God's grace and his good news? What voices are you obedient to?

And what does that say then about where you belong? Just take 30 seconds to think for yourself about those two questions. You might be wondering, how does this all fit together, this kind of Christian thing?

Why would God adopt us? Why is it worth spending your life living like an exile? And the answer in this passage is the mention of Jesus' blood. So look at verse 2.

[20 : 49] To be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood. Now, if you know your Old Testament, then you'll know that being sprinkled with blood was a way of being ritually clean. And the New Testament explodes that and tells us Jesus' blood shed on the cross makes us clean on the inside.

Here's how Ephesians 1 puts it. In him, that's Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

You see, the greatest gift of grace that Peter is hinting at here is Jesus Christ, who shed his blood for our sin to redeem us, to buy us back from death and to set us free forever.

And without that, we're exiles, but forever. No eternal future. That's why we need to be obedient to Jesus and trust him.

That's why Zach and Christian have been baptized today. Because of God's grace to them in Jesus. They've recognized that. Zach and Christian, and anybody here who's following Jesus, when you fail, and you will fail, just like I have failed, like we have all failed, then remember that grace.

[22 : 13] Remember that this life and the life to come does not depend on the shedding of your blood, on your faithfulness, on your obedience. It rests on Jesus' blood and faithfulness and obedience for us.

I'm going to be very un-English and direct for a moment here. In Jesus' name today, I need to call on each of you to do the same as Christian and Zach have done.

To put your trust in the Lord Jesus. To be adopted. Bring that feeling of being scattered, dislocated. Give it to him. Hear him say that you belong, but not here.

Receive from him grace to get home. Don't wait until tomorrow when the distraction of the world will flood back in again. Don't wait. He is calling to you now.

And his desire is to multiply grace and peace to you. Now, forever. Let me pray.

[23 : 26] Lord God, we thank you that you teach us that we belong to you. And that, in the end, we don't belong here. And we thank you that in your blood, there is hope for us.

In your death, there is forgiveness. In your resurrected life, there is hope for us. And in the meantime, there is grace for us on the road that we walk.

Please, Lord, fill our hearts with your good news and your Holy Spirit so that when we are released from this life, we will be gathered upwards and inwards.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to stand and sing together one last song, Christ our hope in life and death.

Let's stand and sing. Amen.