

Displaying and Declaring the Gospel

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Date: 18 May 2025

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[0 : 0 0] So, we're going to think about these words for a few minutes, and especially the words that! We're thinking this evening about the gospel both displayed and declared, but we're going to begin! with an opinion piece that I came across by the novelist! Limeo, and I'm going to begin with an opinion piece that I came across by the novelist Limeo.

Limeo Shriver. Considering the question, why is it that we often find political opinion polls are wrong in their predictions? You may be interested in that, you may not. Her answer is they're often wrong because of shy conservatives with a small c.

That's a global thing, not just in the UK. She was making the observation left-leaning people tend to be political extroverts. They will literally wear the cause on their t-shirt, happy to share their identity and values with anyone that will listen. But social conservatives tend to be more shy, because there's that feeling that if we express our beliefs, well, that might spoil the nice, polite, dinner party mood. And so, the argument goes that until it's election time, those beliefs will be kept a quiet secret, because they know, shy conservatives, that sharing what they believe might lead to arguments or exclusion. And thinking about that opinion piece, I wonder, do we ever as God's people feel like shy Christians? In that sense that we have that appreciation that our values and our beliefs often lead us to be on the outside or reckoned to be on the wrong side of a debate or a discussion, maybe in our family or in our workplace or around the dinner table. Our identity can make us unpopular. Peter, as he writes his letter, is speaking directly to that kind of situation. The first churches that he writes to, he describes them as exiles. Many of them have been literally exiled from Jerusalem. They didn't want

Christians in Jerusalem. Christians were also feeling that they were exiles because they don't fit in the Roman Empire. So, they are saying Jesus is Lord, when the empire is saying Caesar is Lord. They're not offering sacrifices to the pagan gods, but the cities believe that offering those sacrifices was the key to prosperity and security. They are living with a different set of moral ethics and practicing a very different form of worship. And by the time that Peter writes, the Christians are becoming both known and becoming increasingly unpopular. It was becoming dangerous to be a Christian. So, this was written at the time of the beginning of social exclusion, people losing their jobs, being treated with suspicion by their families, sometimes mocked and abused in the public square. Fast forward to the 21st century, we can probably sense some parallels, and maybe we have experienced some of that ourselves.

So, thinking about that context, what does Peter do for us in this text, especially if we find that we are tempted to keep our faith private, to operate as shy Christians? Well, he does two things, I think.

[3 : 39] He reminds followers of Jesus about our identity, and that's hugely important, and then he'll speak to us about our mission. And these are both so important for helping us to live by faith as exiles where we don't fit, where heaven is our true home. So, just think for a few moments about the identity question. You know, who are we as a church? Who are we as the people of God? So, the Christians here have been hearing one message in society. We get hints of it. Chapter 2, verse 12, we read it, live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, so they're being falsely accused in public. Chapter 3, verse 9, Peter encourages the Christians, do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.

They're being treated badly. They're being insulted publicly. Chapter 3, verse 14, but even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Because they are following Jesus, life is getting hard for them. They're the kid that the others are picking on. They're the colleague who is uninvited or who gets the sack. They're the black sheep of the family. And again, maybe we connect with that. And what Peter understands is that people in that situation, what we need to hear is a better word, a word that reminds us of who we truly are and whose we are if we belong to Jesus. And so, he packs these verses full of gospel privilege because of our identity. So, look with me at chapter 2, in verse 4, see where it all begins, as you come to him, the living stone. So, this is where it begins.

It begins with coming to Jesus. And Jesus is described as two things. He's described, first of all, as the living stone and then the chosen and precious cornerstone. In a building in the first century, the cornerstone was key for a number of reasons. It was key to the strength of the building.

It was key for the alignment of the building. It was key to the design of the building. And so, Peter says, remember, you're built on Jesus. Your strength, your design comes from Jesus. He is the chosen and precious cornerstone. He is the rock. And it's interesting that Peter reminds us that just like us, Jesus was rejected. Verse 4, he is the living stone rejected by humans, but chosen by God and precious to him. And the same is true for us. So, Peter goes on to say, in him, you too are like living stones. Believing in him, verse 6 and 7, we receive honor. The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Built on him, Peter says, we will stand firm in our faith. We will not be those who stumble over the claims and identity of Jesus. So, what Peter does for Christians facing the temptation perhaps to hide their faith away because of persecution, he says, listen to God.

Remember what's true of you. You are chosen. You are precious. You are honored and you are loved. Because Peter knows that when the gospel shapes our identity and how we think about ourselves, that is what is going to help us in our gospel mission. To know Jesus and to make Jesus known the Lord. The gospel of God's grace. The gospel of God's grace involves us building our lives, finding strength and security in Christ. But Peter's not even done there. He wants these Christians living as exiles on the margins of society to know more about who and what God has made them, who and what God has made the church. So, again, to think about verse 5, the church, the people of God are the true temple. You are being built into a spiritual house.

[8 : 05] Now, they lived at the time when the temple in Jerusalem was probably still standing, and they understood the significance of it. What Peter is saying, the God of glory now chooses to dwell in the temple among us. God's physical address on the earth is no longer limited to that temple back there in Jerusalem.

It dwells in our hearts by faith. The place where God puts His glory on display in the world is now among His people. What an honor that the king chooses to live here and with us. And connected to that idea, not only are Christians the new temple, we're also a new priesthood. Verse 5 again, you're being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. So, remember again, the work of the Old Testament priests, they were set apart for God to represent Him in the world. They would teach His Word. They would offer the sacrifices so that people could have their sins forgiven. They would act as mediators between God and people. And now, Peter is saying, to the church belongs this highest calling, that we as believers are called to speak the truth of the gospel to one another and to people outside. We too are called to be mediators between God and people as we pray for them, as we stand in the gap for those who don't pray for themselves. It's one of the reasons why we're going to give time to pray tonight, because there are so many hundreds of thousands of people around us in our city who are not praying for themselves today, who are not concerned for their spiritual needs. And so, Peter invites the church to live knowing that Jesus has come and He has secured these privileges. And because that's true, you and I in Christ can have joy, we can have security, and we can have humble confidence. And when that's our identity, that's where we then find the strength to go on mission, because we find that solid, unshakable joy. Then we're ready to face shame and insult and opposition. Okay, so that's the identity question. Well, let's think about what Peter says about the mission question. What are we to do as the church? And that takes us to this idea of displaying and declaring God's praises in the gospel. But maybe to help us with that, maybe some of us at least have been to or we're aware of the idea of the 4D cinema. You know, 4D cinema, it's described on at least one cinema website as an extreme sensory experience, because not only are you watching and not only are you hearing, but it also includes physical effects. So, at the appropriate moment you might get spray or the seat might shake, there might be a wind that blows through the cinema. So, you're seeing the story, you're hearing the story, and you're feeling the story. So, it's an invitation into the story in a whole new way. And the theme of 1 Peter is that the story of God's saving grace is to be experienced by His people and then given to the church in 4D. That we hear it and we see it and we feel its effects and we invite the world to know the same.

As we live as God's new society, known for offering eternal life in the place of death, as we live as a community marked by unity and not division, where together we seek to pursue righteousness and righteousness and not wickedness, where we give this living testimony that joy and peace is found in Jesus, a joy and peace greater than anything else this world offers, then we are giving people the chance to experience the gospel the way God intends it. Specifically in our verses, we've got the idea of displaying the glory of God to the world. That's one of our callings as a church, to show the world in the way that we live and the way that we live together what God is like. But we also declare who God is and what He's done to save us in Jesus. So, look at verse 9, and we have those reminders, those amazing titles. Remember, these guys are exiles, far from home, on the margins of society, they don't really belong, but they're given these amazing titles that were used of Israel in the Old

Testament. So, in Exodus 19, you find here is God and He sent Moses to rescue the people from slavery and He brings them across the Red Sea and through the wilderness and to Mount Sinai. And before they get the law, they're reminded of grace and they're given their identity. And it's this language, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. Only now it's applied to the church of the Lord Jesus. Again, to think about the purpose of God calling Israel, why did He call one nation among many? Because He wanted to put His grace and glory on display. Here are image bearers and they're showing what God is like in the way that they worship, which is so different from the nations around them, in their ways of working and of resting, in the words that they were using, in the welcome they were giving to the foreigner and to the weak. They were showing, this is what God is like, this is what makes

His community different. And Peter now says that mission belongs to us. Those who have been saved by Jesus, who are filled with the Spirit of Jesus, are called to put His glory on display.

[14 : 21] So, how do we do that? Well, think about the language here, He says, we live as God's chosen people. God has chosen us and adopted us, so we love one another as family, the way God has first loved us.

He calls us to live as a royal priesthood. And what did the priests do? They brought God's Word to bear on the lives of people. And they helped bring peace between God and people and with one another. And so, we bring that message and we bring peace. And we live as a holy nation, not trying to blend in, as tempting as that is. We are called to live differently, to live God's way under the rule of King Jesus. The others might be drawn in because they see there is something distinctively good about the goodness of Jesus that they see in us.

And we bring that message to us. To think about that saying that actions speak louder than words, we demonstrate the gospel through our lives as well as preaching it in our words.

So, we display God's glory. But we're also called here to declare God's glory in the gospel. Verse 9, we declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

And the story is told of a Boston preacher from the last century called A.J. Gordon. And one, I don't know if it was a Sunday, it might have been a Sunday, he saw this young boy in front of his church with an old rusty cage and some wild birds in the cage. He trapped them. And so, A.J. Gordon asked him a question, what are you going to do with those birds? And he said, well, I'll play with them for a while.

[16 : 10] And then when I'm bored, I'll feed them to my cat. A very thoughtful thing to do. So, the minister said, well, can I buy them from you? To which the question was asked, well, why would you want to buy them?

You're just getting some wild birds from the field. They don't sing. They don't do anything. You're getting a bad bargain. But nevertheless, A.J. Gordon paid his \$2. The boy went away happy.

Gordon got the cage and he opened the door and he watched those birds fly away. And the next Sunday, he took the cage into church to help to explain the gospel. And so, he's speaking to his congregation about the reality that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, those who are trapped by sin.

And Jesus came and paid a far higher price. He purchased freedom for his people by his precious blood. And then A.J. Gordon said to his church, that little boy told me that these birds had no value and they weren't songbirds. But when I released them and they flew heavenward, he said, it seemed to me they were singing, redeemed, redeemed, redeemed. And that really is the way of life for us as the people of God. We are called to live with joy, singing and celebrating this joyful message of redemption. How does Peter put it? He says, we declare the praises who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. He says, remember, once you were not a people, you were separated from God, far away from God, but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy, you were helpless and hopeless, but now in Christ you have received mercy. Trapped in sin, but now the cage door is open and we are free. And as we are free, we sing the song of the redeemed. It's a natural response to praise the God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Wonderful light. So, it's our mission as the church to both display and declare the gospel. To live with faith and not with fear, because we know that our hearts and lives and our identity has been transformed by Jesus and the Spirit in us.

Like those first apostles, like Peter, we know salvation is found in no one else, and so we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard when it comes to Jesus. That as we appreciate what God has done for us in Christ, all of a sudden the glory of the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that becomes our highest concern and our greatest treasure. And so, we want to live to praise the one who showed us mercy, who has made us a people, his people, who has shone his light, the light of the gospel of saving grace to replace our darkness. So, that's what we're called to do, to display and to declare. And that's going to involve us committing ourselves to God and His power and His work in our. And so, one of the things that we're going to do tonight is we're going to pray. We're going to pray for our mission and we're going to think about the work of God here in Edinburgh and for the