

# Seeking to Share Christ with our City Pt 1 -- Priests and Pilgrims

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please sit down. If you'd like to pick up your Bible and turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, the reading that was read earlier, page 1015, that'd be very helpful to follow along.

Can I welcome you, if you're new with us this evening, if you're here for summer or just visiting with us, a special welcome to Hazel, baby Hazel. This is the first time I've met baby Hazel, and this sermon is for you, Hazel.

The mum told me that she screamed until mum brought her to church. This is a godly child already. She knows what's good for her. So baby Hazel, I want to summarise the message for you.

This is the message very basically, that as you grow in Christ, not everyone's going to like your faith. You follow a Lord who's better than anything else in this whole world.

And even though people may be negative to you about your faith, you need to be unreservedly positive, constantly good, shining as a light.

[ 1 : 05 ] And that way, people will glorify Christ on the day of visitation. And all God's people said, Amen. That's basically the message tonight. That's it.

That's the sermon. But I've got a text here, so we'll keep going. For the rest of us, I remind you that we are doing a series on the vision, our three-part vision at St. John's.

Looks like this. A community of contrast, three parts. Gripped by the gospel of grace. And tonight we're looking at sharing Christ with the city.

And it's this third part that is what Peter writes about in chapter 2. How do we live out a Christian faith today in Vancouver?

What does it look like to be gripped by the gospel of grace? What difference does it make for us as a church? Church. And just a word to Hazel. The problem with even using the word church today is that it's been almost completely severed from its original meaning.

[ 2 : 09 ] It's got a lot of baggage. So some people today think church means buildings, strange buildings into which people go, like museums. People who are a little bit odd, not very healthy for you, unless you like that sort of thing.

Other people, when they hear the word church, think of institutions that are repressive on human rights, on women's rights, judgmental, done untold damage.

Just think of the residential schools' terrible situation. Which, sadly, we as Christians have to say, yes, there's much we need to repent from. And for many churchgoers, we've been so shaped by consumerism and individualism that we can't help thinking that church is a kind of a resource that I add to my spiritual life, a tool for my growth, but it's not really part of my identity.

It's an add-on. So if church gets irritating, or if people are at church that I don't really like, or things don't go my way, I'll go somewhere else and find another thing I can add on to my spiritual life.

I just don't need the hassle. And if, as we read through the letter of Peter earlier, that is almost the complete opposite of what Peter says.

[ 3 : 34 ] He says, every local church is a spiritual building, not a physical building, made up of those who've come to Jesus Christ, who've received new life from him, who've been born anew to a living hope.

Jesus Christ is the foundation for the church and for our lives. And what God is doing is he is building us into a spiritual building so that he might live with us, not as individuals, but as a community.

That's what it says. So look at verse 4 again, please. As you come to Jesus, ongoingly, the living stone, rejected by humanity, rejected by men, but in God's sight chosen and highly honoured.

You yourselves, like living stones, are, by God, being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This, Peter says, this is our identity now. This is not what we will be. In other words, look around, just look around. We are living, they're living bricks.

[ 4 : 50 ] We're not looking around. That's okay. We're a bit anxious about doing that. We're living bricks. We're not meant to be on our own or living in piles. God is actually building us into, together, to a spiritual palace which he will one day live in utterly.

And that means in this world in which we live, or here in Vancouver, there are two massive building projects going on at the same time. There's the Vancouver Development Project, and I don't mean physical buildings.

There's a spiritual project going on here in the West Coast. It's the human project to build a life for ourselves without God, to make this world the best place it can possibly be without Jesus, heaven on earth, and the question for that world is, what's in it for me?

But there's a second building project going on. It's God's project, and that's a spiritual house which is going to last forever, and it's made up of believers corporately together, who are being built onto Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, so we take all our shape and all our life from him, and the question in that project is, what's in it for him?

And you don't have to have much imagination to realise that these projects are in conflict with one another. And the basic conflict is over the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, not whether he exists, but how important he is, whether he's precious.

[ 6 : 16 ] So in this world, Hazel, there are two radically different views of Jesus. To us, he's chosen and precious, to God, he's chosen and precious, the living stone, the touchstone of human life and dignity.

But to others, he's not the key to life. He may be worthless. He's not the Lord of grace and goodness, and he is to be rejected as the most important thing.

That is why, when you come to faith in Christ, you feel like you are in exile, and you have a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and it makes us strangers in this world.

Strangers sometimes in our families, or with our friends. Because, you see, what we've done, by choosing Jesus Christ as the most important thing, we've done something vaguely treasonous in our world.

We are saying that there's a higher claim on our love and our life and our loyalty and allegiance than everything in this world. And we're betraying the world's basic attitude to Jesus.

[ 7 : 24 ] We're saying our hopes are in him, my life is in him, my love is in him, he is the reason for my life. And do you know what the world says? That's a shame, really. That's such a shame.

Now, are people with me so far? Are you happily with me? Good. Okay, good. Thank you. That's good. Otherwise, I'm going to do the whoop-whoop thing.

Okay? All right. So the reason I use this word shame is because the first readers in the Roman Empire lived in a society which revolved around honour and shame.

And the new birth from Jesus, from God above, and the commitment to Jesus Christ, opened them to public shaming, which was very dangerous for the first readers.

All the pressure in the Roman Empire was to fit in with the Roman Empire. And these Christians, although they're not yet experiencing systematic persecution and being burnt, they're certainly victims of verbal insults and mocking.

[ 8 : 34 ] Read through the book. Because their new loyalty to Jesus Christ is seen as threatening, because they've bought into a higher power than Caesar and the Roman Empire. And again and again and again through this letter, Peter warns, and I say this for Hazel's benefit, that people will speak evil of us as Christians.

If you're a young Christian, you're in high school, people will say bad things about your Christian faith. And they'll say it completely unfairly. It won't be just.

Just listen to this honour-shame language in verses 6 and 7.

For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I'm laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen, and this is the word specially honoured, precious.

Jesus is honoured by God. Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame forever. So the honour, this is the amazing part, here is the promise, the honour that God gives to Jesus is for you who believe.

[ 9 : 47 ] That's almost too good to be true. That when you trust Jesus Christ, God gives us the honour that belongs really to Jesus Christ. Why is that?

Because on the cross, the Bible makes clear that Jesus embraced all our shame and disgrace and died in our place. So the honour is for you who believe. Now, if I could just...

If there's one other thing you remember about this sermon, remember this, that we have a... You have a source of honour. We have a source of honour that is greater and richer and higher and fully than any honour on earth.

And that is absolutely infuriating to those in the human project on the West Coast. Now, I think our society, which people used to say would be an innocent guilt-style society, is becoming...

is working much more along the lines of honest shame. Andy Crouch, who is a modern Christian writer, wrote a couple of years ago that social media has moved us to being a fame-shame culture.

[ 10 : 53 ] And it's done that mostly through social media. And social media was created as a voice and a platform for those who are disenfranchised.

But it's become weaponised into the perfect tool for bullying. And the way bullying happens on social media is by shaming others. And one of the ways that you can gain honour and social capital on social media is by public shaming others.

And then when you publicly shame someone else, everyone has to pile on. And if you don't pile on, you're open yourself to be shamed. And Andy Crouch says that the remedy for shame is not fame. It's not being affirmed. Being affirmed is just trying to go back and being thought of highly by others. And it doesn't change the fundamental sense of unworthiness we have.

And the only answer for that is that God is not just willing to affirm you, but he's willing to honour you. It's not healed by affirming. It's not healed by taking social media away.

[ 12 : 04 ] The cure for shame is being known, he says, and incorporated into a genuine community that has a different standard of honour.

That's why Peter writes this passage. He wants us, he really wants us, he wants to bring together our astonishing privileges that we have in belonging to Christ and show how that bears on our relationship with those around us in the city.

And if you're teased or if you're mocked for your Christian faith by dishonour, you know how you're supposed to respond? By honouring others. If you are put into disgrace, you are meant to respond with grace.

If you are cursed by the words of others, you're meant to bless. In fact, this is God's great mission strategy in the world.

The way the risen Christ reaches others is through this, through local communities like this as they live in the world. I want to say this really clearly.

[ 13 : 12 ] We are not here to condemn the world. As Christians, we should never be antagonistic into our culture. We never deliberately position ourselves at odds with those around us.

That's not what we choose to do. We might be seen as odd. And some of you are odd, frankly. But we're odd because we bear witness to and are driven by a different reality.

Now, I just... This is so difficult to express how radical this is. And I want to give you the illustration of the early Christians in the Roman Empire. If you lived in the days when Peter wrote this letter, what was your one value above everything else?

It was survival. And the way you survived was by being friends to your friends, those who could help you, and by being bad and harming your enemies.

Right? Being good to your friends and harming your enemies. That was the solid rule of life in the Roman Empire. Sounds like the solid rule of social media from what I understand.

[ 14 : 15 ] But these people have turned to a Jewish man who was crucified in the most shame-filled death. And now they've been told they have to forgive their enemies and do them good to the people around them who live in an honour-based society.

It's utterly baffling. It's utterly ridiculous. And we've got records. The early Christians were suspected of being deceitful. They're doing something secretive and wrong to us by doing this.

But the only reason Christians are able to love their enemies is because of Christ's death and resurrection. Because in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, God has shown that he loves us utterly, absolutely, unshakably, eternally, unbreakably.

and we're gripped by that grace and since God has forgiven us, we forgive others. And I wish I had more time on this, but I need to move on.

But Peter has a unique way of putting this. The privilege of being built into this spiritual house is transformational. And how does this privilege transform the way we live in our society with others? [15:34] And the answer in this passage is through a double priesthood. Verse 5 and verse 9. This is two sides of living out our faith in this city.

Stay with me. The first one is in verse 5. You are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices. See that in verse 5? You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. It's warm in here, isn't it? There's ice cream outside, isn't there? Okay, I'll keep going then. Just notice please, we're not individually priests.

This is a collective priesthood. So a church is not a sum of the individuals in it. We are not a group of people who've chosen to belong to this church.

This is a privilege of being a priesthood that God gives to the local church body. It's a new identity that God gives to each Christian community. And the reason God's given us this privilege is so that we can offer him spiritual sacrifices, which is a big, fat, general term for anything we do in this life that is obedient to God.

[16:58] Anything we do that tries to live out the Christian faith in the city. So, what do you do with your summer? What do you do with your money? What do you think about your career?

What do you think about your children or about marriage? What do you think about your achievements? Whether you are, what do you think about your success? How do you think about your failure? How do you live in the neighbourhood?

How do you drive? And the best illustration for this is in verses 11 and 12. Just look down to that, please. Loved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Very sensible. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles, that's a term for those around you, honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, and they will, they may see your good deeds, which we hope they do, and glorified God on the day of visitation, which is our prayer. So, as strangers and exiles belonging to Jesus Christ in this culture, we're meant to be fully engaged with the city with a different moral compass. With a different moral compass, which means people will speak evil of you completely unjustly, and the temptation, if you're young, is to retaliate or to withdraw or to become passive or passive-aggressive.

[18:28] But when others speak evil against us, we do what Jesus did and we don't withdraw, but we seek to do good, do good, do good, not just because that's what Jesus did, but because when people see that good, Peter expects that they may give glory to God who is in heaven.

And I think that's much more difficult the closer the relationship. If you're in a family that has brothers and sisters who used to belong to the church and have gone away or parents who used to be Christians and have gone away, now they will criticise and mock your faith as vaguely ridiculous, as out of step.

And you can be an exiled stranger in your own family and the insults are hard, painful. How do we deal with them? Chapter 3, look at this later, verse 9.

Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That's what God's called you to do and he will grant you his blessing.

Let me give you an illustration. I know we live in Canada, but the news is full of the abortion decision recently. And I don't know if you're anything like me, but I find the voices on all sides of the abortion issue right now completely strident.

[19:52] And how should the grace of God show itself as we respond here? Since the early days of Christianity, Christians have always stood for life and for the vulnerable.

In Roman days, we have evidence, of course, there was no contraception, if you had a baby and the baby was unwanted and there were three primary reasons that a baby was unwanted.

It was sickly, it was ugly, or you had enough children. What the practice was was to expose the baby. I don't mean to distress anyone here, but they would leave it outside until it died.

They would either do that in the street, on the garbage heap, or in the sewer. And right from the beginning, Christians sought to do good. And sometimes all they could do was to pick up the baby's body and give them a burial with dignity.

But very frequently, Christian families took babies into their families and raised them as their own children. Imagine that in the Roman Empire. Presenting them for baptism.

[ 20 : 57 ] And in the catacombs in Rome, we've got evidence of single mothers doing this with a number of children. children. That's offering a spiritual sacrifice of your life to God, I reckon.

It's just a completely different way of acting and reacting to what we are hearing today. Peter is concerned about how the society around us reacts to us.

How they perceive, obviously, Christian behavior. Because what we do with ourselves ought to be recognizably good to others even if they disagree with us.

It ought to be that your friends would say, I don't know what they believe. It's crazy some of the things they believe, but gee, they're good to have around. And I think as Canadians, there's so much in our context we have to be thankful for.

And I'm not just talking about the physical beauty, the love of peace and justice, the attempt to rule of law. But the thing about doing good is it's completely open-ended. There's no one single way to do this.

[ 21 : 59 ] There's no 155 rules of doing good as a Christian. How you will do this in your place and in your way will be different than the way I do it.

And it may be that you volunteer in something in the city and stay in that or it may be that you belong as regulars to different things.

I used this illustration this morning. I used to go to a hair salon and get my hair cut, believe it or not. And when I first went, as a minister, people ask you what you do and you try and open the possibility of a conversation.

And I tried everything and nothing worked. And I kept going for 12 years and at 12 years this woman who was also cutting my wife's hair at the time mentioned the fact that her sister was going to Israel and she said, do you think that's a good idea?

I said, it's a great idea. She said, I don't know anything about Israel. I think I should read the Bible with someone. Do you know anyone who I could read the Bible with? I said, yes! So, but that was 12 years of haircuts and stood me in very good stead, can I say.

[ 23 : 11 ] I don't know what the positive thing in your context is to do and I think that's why we need each other and even if we're misunderstood, God has made us into a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices and that's the first part of sharing Christ with the city but there's a second part more briefly.

There's a second priesthood. You notice down in verse 9, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a bit different, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvellous light.

This is a very famous verse. This is where the church for a couple of hundred years has got the teaching about the priesthood of all believers from. Priesthood of all believers mean that the church is not clergy dominated but every Christian has access to God and this is true.

But in the original context this verse and the verse in Exodus 19 it comes from has nothing to do with our relationships inside the people of God.

It's got to do with our relationships with those outside the church. This was given just before God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and God says, you are my treasured possession, all the earth is mine, so you'll be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

[ 24 : 35 ] He says, since all the earth is mine, I've chosen you Israel and now Peter says, you church for a very special role in this world. You are to stand between me and this world to proclaim my praise.

You're meant to live in this world not consuming or controlling or dominating but to bear witness to my riches and my goodness. And when Peter says proclaim the excellencies, it's literally take what we have inside and speak about it outside.

Broadcast it, advertise it, talk about it, praise God to others, talk him up to others. Don't worry, it doesn't mean you have to become a preacher. Don't be that person who comes into a conversation with four points you have to get across.

You will lose friends that way. I know Peter's expectation is that as we're gripped by the gospel of grace and we live out of God's love, people will see the difference and they'll ask you about it and when we're asked about it we need to be ready to give an account and the account will be the praise of God.

Now I know praise is a bit of a churchy word but it's not. We do praise all the time and I want to give you an illustration from this week. So we have a family staying with us from Australia and my 13

year old nephew has introduced me to videos of Fabio Wibmer.

[ 26 : 03 ] Now I'm just going to test the coolness of this congregation. Put your hand off if you heard of Fabio. Thank you. What? Two? Three? More?

Not very cool. So Fabio is a downhill bicycle racer who has made a whole lot of money. He made a whole lot eclipse riding illegally through places like Paris and he comes down from Sacre Coeur on a bicycle and there are 150 steps and he'll leap off the top step and he'll bounce twice hit the curb jump over a bridge it's astonishing I've never seen anything like it and do you know what I'm doing now?

Praise. That's just praise. And we do it all the time. We do it with food we do it with people we do it with things around us and what this is just saying we need to do this with God it's beautiful because it keeps life and lip together not living a good life and never saying anything not saying anything and not living a good life it's beautiful because we're so full of weakness and we're so full of failure you might wish God has set someone else apart for this task and not you but God has not done it because he's worried about the survival of the church he hasn't done it because he needs us to be a witness to him it's the opposite this is a gift that he has given to us to mediate his promise and his presence to his world and how we live and what we say it is a gift to us and a privilege to be included in what he's doing and what a gift to Vancouver eh what a gift to Vancouver to have a group of people living in Vancouver who haven't completely bought into the west coast world view who don't think that

Vancouver has the last word on reality people who are not captive to their own narrative and trying to curate their own fragile identities through videos the people who've been given an identity from the outside made living stones because of their connection with Jesus Christ being built into a spiritual house the people who are able to love the world when we're mocked because we're not looking to the world to love us we're looking to God to love us who are able to do good even when we're accused of being ridiculous and evil because we know the source of all goodness and we've been gripped by the gospel of grace■■■■ so cheers now