Community of Contrast Pt 2 -- Doing Good By Grace

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[0:00] All right, pop quiz time. Close your bulletins. Close them. Gonna have the ushers go up and down the aisles. The old building, we had these sticks on the third or fourth pew that was like a warden smashing pole or something.

I was told we're allowed to bash people who fell asleep with it. But we'll use those if we have to. Close your bulletins. This is a pop quiz. I wonder if anyone here has any idea at all what our church's vision statement is.
Don't put it on the screen. If you're watching from home, don't put it on their screen either. Let's wait. I have never seen a more awkward looking group of people in my life. St. John's is a community.
Unity of contrast. Gripped by the gospel of grace. Sharing Christ with our city. I think it'd be really cool if next week we could just shout it and whoever's preaching wouldn't know what hit them. That's our vision statement. And we're going to unpack it together by looking at 1 Peter. This is week four of looking at 1 Peter together. And this week our text gets really practical.
[1:27] Looking to answer how we are called to live as a community of contrast that is sharing Christ with our city. So the big question this week is how do we share Christ with our city?

We live in a secular society. Say that again. And that means it is socially inappropriate for anyone to assert any religious knowledge or ethics or values.
To share your faith in our city is rude. To assert your beliefs is offensive. There's an unspoken rule that no one should openly engage in any evangelistic or missionary activity in Vancouver.
We are implicitly taught that we should not seek to share Christ with our city. And yet that is what we're called to do.
So what are we supposed to do? How do we follow Christ in a world that doesn't? And specifically, how do we share Christ and the good news of his gospel of grace in a city that is signaling to us that it doesn't want to know him?
[2:42] Peter is writing to a very similar situation. Christianity is starting to get noticed in the Roman Empire by the time this letter is being written.

It's less than 50 years after Jesus has risen from the dead. And Christians are starting to get identified as people who are abstaining from the state religion of worshiping the emperor as a god. And instead they're claiming that Jesus is Lord and Caesar isn't. So we don't think there was any official state persecution when Peter wrote this letter.
But instead what Christians were experiencing was this awkward social ostracism and skepticism. Christians are being teased or verbally insulted or socially excluded.
Does that remind you of anywhere? Their context and ours are very similar in that sense. Christians in Canada are not being rounded up and arrested for our faith.
[3:46] But we are finding ourselves ostracized from public life. We're being pushed to the margins. And we're often treated with awkwardness at best. And hostility or even persecution at worst.

And it's into this context that we are commanded to share our faith. To share Christ with our secular skeptical city. And Peter tonight tells us how to do it.
Peter doesn't tell Christians to arrange huge evangelistic events or services. Or to start preaching on the street corners. Or to bring in a Christian celebrity like St. Peter or St. Paul to grow their churches.

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Instead he appeals to Christians to live good lives in their secular society. Lives marked by submission, service, and good deeds.
There's a book I read called Everyday Church. And it's a pastor in America and in the UK. So basically Canada. And the authors summarize Peter's point of view this way. They write, So how we live our everyday lives is our evangelism.
[5:14] Our everyday, ordinary, routine actions are how we share Christ with our city. We let our lives speak. As Parker Palmer wrote.

In our passage, Peter outlines two big areas in each of our lives. And he elaborates how we can share Christ in each of them. These are two spheres of everyday evangelism that all of us experience in our society.
First of all, in verses 13 to 17, he talks about how should we live in a society that's ruled by a government. And then in verses 18 to 20, he talks about how we should live at work.
And then in chapter 3, right after our text, he speaks about how everyday evangelism looks in our households. In our marriages. Again, a quote from Everyday Church.
Notice where mission takes place. In the neighborhood, in the workplace, and in the home. Not in the meetings of the church. We reach a hostile world by living good lives in the context of ordinary life.
[6:23] Everyday mission. Peter tells Christians in a secular society how we should relate to our governments, our bosses, and our spouses. And he highlights in these three contexts, these everyday, ordinary settings of life.

This is where evangelism truly takes place. This is how we are to be a community of contrast that shares Christ with our city. It's everyday evangelism.
So how do I do it? What does it actually look like? At the beginning of each of Peter's three sections, this is chapter 2, verse 13, verse 17, and then chapter 3, verse 1.
Peter uses one word to describe what our posture should be towards our secular governments, bosses, and spouses. In order to share Christ with our city. And the word is submit.
Or be subject. Look at verse 13. Verse 18. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
[7:32] Verse 18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. Chapter 3, verse 1.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands. To be subject means to submit yourself. Literally, to place yourself underneath.
To set yourself below another person. To be subject, to submit, is to willingly lower yourself. It's voluntary to embrace a lower status that you might exalt or elevate another person.
So everyday evangelism happens when Christians willingly use our freedom to place ourselves under or below others.
So when we take the posture of a servant, putting ourselves under another in order to serve them, especially if they're unjust. That is what everyday evangelism actually looks like.
[8:41] This is the apostle Peter's grand plan to share Christ with the entire world. Christians, as you face social ostracism and criticism and skepticism, as progressive pressures at work and slurs against you begin, respond by setting yourself below others.

Be subject to your secular leaders in your life. That's the strategy to share Christ with our city. What do you think of Peter's strategy?
I think it sounds terrible. What an awful idea. What a horrible global mission strategy. What is Peter thinking?
Can you think of a single church that operates this way? Imagine if I wanted to plant a church and the whole premise is we're going to face suffering and then we're going to submit to the person who's wrongly accusing us.
Imagine if a pastor told you our goal to reach our city is to be subject to secular leaders, especially when they insult us for our faith or unjustly cause us to suffer.
[9:54] It's ridiculous. It'll never work. Except it did. And it does. And according to Peter, it's exactly what we are to do.

Let's see how a community of contrast sharing Christ with our city works. By looking first at what it looks like to submit to our government, and then second, by submitting to our employers.

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And we aren't looking at the third tonight. I kind of wish we were. Submitting to our spouses. But it's there in chapter three for you to study. And it follows the same logic. But for tonight, we'll look at submitting to our governments and then submitting to our secular bosses as Peter's strategy for us to be a community of contrast sharing Christ with our city.
So first, submit to your government. Peter writes in verse 13, Live as people who are free.
Not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God.
[11:22] Honor the emperor. The Roman government, at the writing of this letter, is about to start persecuting Christians officially.

Peter himself would be executed by the Romans for his allegiance to Christ soon after this letter was written. But rather than tell Christians to rise up and overthrow Caesar, or to leave the Roman Empire and start a new Christian country, new Rome, Peter tells them to remain where they are and to be subject to Rome.
This is how we share Christ with our city. We don't run away. We don't hide. We are a visible community of contrast that chooses to be subject to the human institutions that govern us.
This raises a lot of questions. Should Christians always, in every circumstance, submit to our governments, no matter how evil or corrupt or violent?
Should we never protest or become activists for godly causes? Should Christians have submitted to Hitler, or Stalin, or Mao?
[12:39] Should Christians today, living in Iran, or North Korea, or Somalia, or Vancouver, support their government, no matter what it's legislating? Look closely again at Peter's words.

Be subject, for the Lord's sake, to every institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
Peter writes, we submit to our governments for the Lord's sake. We submit to our governments with the assumption that they are promoting goodness and punishing evil, as verse 14 says.
Peter says we should submit to political authority and we should be known as good citizens. But notice, in the same breath, Peter says we need to fear God and honor the emperor.
So what about when you can't do those two things at the same time? What do we do when honoring our political leaders comes at the expense of fearing God?
[13:46] If submitting to our leaders means turning away from the will of God? What then? There's a letter we have from around the same time 1 Peter was written by a Roman governor whose name was Pliny.

I looked up a photo of him and a beer came up that's called Pliny. I don't really know what to do with that. But this guy wrote a letter. He's a governor of a Roman province.
And he's kind of exasperated because these Christians are popping up in his province and he doesn't know what to do with them. And the problem he has is that Christians are doing nothing wrong. They're great citizens.
But they won't worship Caesar. So he writes in his ancient letter, the sum and substance of their faults has been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day, Sundays, before dawn, 8 a.m. service, and sing responsibly a hymn to Christ as to a God.
And to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but rather they promised not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, nor falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so.
[14:49] And when this gathering was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food, but ordinary and innocent food. So Pliny writes to the emperor and describes what these pesky Christians are doing.

But he says all they're doing is gathering together, singing a hymn to Christ, collectively committing that they're going to do good in society, and then they go out for breakfast together. In other words, they're good citizens.
But when they're put before the governor, they will not forsake their faith in Christ. In the Roman Empire, once a year, you needed to make a public sacrifice to Caesar at the nearby pagan temple. So you'd take some special food consecrated to the gods, you'd walk to the altar, you'd throw it on the flames, and you'd say, Caesar is Lord. It was this routine social custom that bound the empire under Caesar.
But Christians refused to do it. In other words, they refused to submit to Roman law. They refused to be subject to Caesar because of their allegiance to Christ.

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[15:57] They chose to fear God over honoring the emperor. Pliny continues, I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians. Those who confessed, I interrogated a second and third time, threatening them with punishment.

Those who persisted, I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. I should teach my children that last line.
Pliny is exasperated because the Christians are good citizens with a faith that commits to doing good. But they refuse to honor Caesar over fearing God.
They're guilty of inflexible obstinacy, that they would rather die than choose Rome over Christ.
Okay, here's what all of this means for us.
Peter is saying we should not submit to any secular authority at the expense of our allegiance to Christ. He teaches us in verse 16 that we are free through Christ, but we should in freedom now give ourselves to the service of God.
[17:09] We should willingly offer our lives to God. we should become his servants. And a servant of God submits to secular leadership so long as that leadership does not require the Christian to abandon their allegiance to Christ.

So if you must choose between honoring your government or fearing God, then we must be willing to be arrested or even unjustly killed in order to show that our hope and our ultimate allegiance is Christ.
Now I realize this has huge implications for us today. There are huge implications for people in the medical field being forced to affirm life-ending procedures or other potentially harmful practices. There are huge implications for educators who are being empowered to teach children and young people secular values and morals that are odds with God's will for humanity. The bottom line is this. We are to be subject to our authorities. We are to commit to do good. But our ultimate allegiance must always be to Christ and to his will.
[18:18] And we must not be afraid of what may happen to us if we fear God above all else. That's what Peter did. It's the unwavering posture of honoring our government while fearing God that shows us to be a community of contrast, gripped by the gospel, sharing Christ with our city.

Notice Peter assumes persecution for Christians in a secular society. And so should we. And his advice is that we should be subject to our authorities.
We should do good in society for this is the will of God that our servant hearted goodness will silence the ignorance of foolish people. So this is how we share Christ with our city.
By submitting ourselves to our authorities. By honoring God above all. And by doing good deeds in order to serve our neighbors. Secondly, Peter now writes what everyday evangelism looks like at work.
He writes in verse 18, Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect. Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing.
[19:31] When mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

At work, because you want to honor and serve God, submit yourself to whoever is over you. Submit yourself to them, whatever their character, that your goodness may witness to the fact that you love God and you desire to live to serve him.
Even if the person over you is harsh, be willing to suffer for doing good. I studied biology at UBC for my undergrad, and I remember I had a professor in a biology class, an evolutionary biology class, who was an atheist, and completely antagonistic, almost comically antagonistic, towards any faith. He'd always say something like, now you could believe, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Just trying to goad us. And he would often in class dismiss any biblical faith as irrational nonsense, and he'd try to embarrass any of us who held religious belief.
He was an angry man, and he was very, very antagonistic towards Christianity. And he taught this course, he actually co-taught it, there was a second professor who would teach every other lecture.
[21:02] And this second guy was lovely, gracious, soft-spoken, gentle, funny, and relatable. He was like a loving grandfather to his students.

Just wanted to give him a hug. And through my dad, who's a professor at UBC, I found out that the lovely professor was a Christian. And although his colleague publicly slandered his faith, he

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remained gracious, kind, and warm.
He never spoke against the atheist professor. He never rebutted his remarks. Think in your own life. Who or where are you being slandered for your faith? What friend or family member or colleague is giving you a hard time for following Jesus?
How did you respond to that person the last time that happened? In anger? In defense? In fear? What would it look like next time to respond instead by being subject to them?
[22:18] to endure sorrows while suffering unjustly? To commit to do good to that person, however they treat you, because it's a gracious thing, it's a pleasing sacrifice in the sight of God.

Overcome evil by doing good. Let your life be your evangelism, your apologetic. And so the next time you are slandered for your faith, and in Vancouver you will be.
Intentionally respond with love and good deeds. Submit yourself to your accuser. It's powerful, completely countercultural display when someone in a secular work setting endures unjust suffering while doing good.
Again, Peter assumes persecution. He writes this originally to slaves. He's not naive that following Jesus in a society that doesn't will lead to suffering and being treated unjustly.
And yet, it's how we respond to these unfair situations that are some of the greatest opportunities for witness. It's these settings that we prove ourselves to be a community of contrast.
[23:34] That we have a living hope that is not dependent on our immediate circumstance. To finish, Peter turns to write about what motivates and empowers us to live life this way.

Look at verse 21. To this you are called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.
Our motivation is our Messiah. Our example is Jesus Christ. Peter reminds us, using the words of Isaiah 53, that Jesus committed no sin.
He never lied. When people hurled insults at him, he never retaliated, never spoke up to defend himself. When he suffered, he made no threats, even though the entire heavenly host was at his command.
Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Verse 24, he himself willingly bore our sins on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.
[24:44] By his wounds we have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Our motivation is Christ.

Our example is Christ. The king of the universe, the creator of the cosmos, became a servant, a slave. Our God became our servant.
For Peter, this is at the heart of who Jesus is. Most centrally, Jesus was willing to become a servant. And so the way we show Jesus to our world, the way we share Christ with our city, is we mimic him.
We become servants, just as he came to serve. Peter's strategy to share Christ is not his idea. He saw Jesus live this way.
He saw God the Son submit to human authorities, to religious masters, to Roman soldiers. He saw him come not to be served, but to serve, and to take the ultimate form of service, laying down his life as a ransom for many.
[25:59] This everyday evangelism strategy of being subject to those over us is Christ's strategy. strategy. And it worked. And it continues to today.

We share Christ by mimicking Christ, by being subject and subservient to those around us, especially if they criticize our faith or cause us sorrow and suffering.
To this you have been called. Think about that. You've been called to this because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.
Jesus is our example. He's our model. That word example is a very specific, unique word. It only occurs here in the entire Bible.
It's called a hapax legomena. Pull that out at your next dinner party. Wow. It's only here in the entire Bible. example. This word example is the word for a classroom stencil that children would use to trace when they're learning how to write letters.
[27:08] So Peter is saying Jesus is our stencil. He is what our lives are meant to trace into our world. Scholar Karen Jobes writes, Jesus' suffering is not simply an example.

He's the paradigm by which Christians write large the letters of his gospel in their lives. Our lives trace Jesus' life.

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His ministry and his life is the stencil, the boundary, the paradigm by which we should live. And as we live mimicking him, our lives are tracing and writing his gospel clearly wherever we go.
So this week, wherever your work, whatever you do, mimic Christ. May he be the stencil for how you live. put Jesus on display by how you act and speak and behave.
This is how the world comes to know God through us. We are a community of contrast, gripped by the gospel of grace, sharing Christ with our city.
[28:14] Let's pray.

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