

# Chosen Exiles

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[ 0 : 00 ] Two other self-indulgent moments just quickly. I have left, for anyone who did want to sign up for prayer updates while we're away, I left a sheet out on the Connect desk last chance because we will be gone after today.

So please do do that. And the other thing I wanted to say is we're jumping into a bit of 1 Peter today without the chance to kind of chase the rest of it. So I'm leaving it on you to keep reading 1 Peter over Christmas.

It's a good book any time, but hopefully after today your appetite will be sufficiently wetted so that you will chase that and get all the gold that God has placed in there.

Let's leave me and all the distractions to the side now and ask that God would focus us on his word and what he wants to say. Father God, you are incredibly good.

We have already talked about and sung about and prayed about the joy that is Christmas, the joy and wonder it is that you would enter your creation for sinful people like us.

[ 1 : 01 ] And so, Father, we ask that this morning as you speak to us in your word that you would reveal yourself to us, that you would give us a vision for the lives that you would have us live, that you would give us the ability to grasp even tighter the substance of the hope that you have purchased for us through the blood of Jesus.

Father, we pray that you would equip us by your spirit to be salt and light in the world. Amen. Some of you may not have noticed, but just in late November, Google, the internet search engine in Australia, made an interesting decision.

If you were to search for, for example, the opening hours of Chatswood Chase on Christmas, the tagline at the bottom inserted by Google would have read, this date may be impacted by Family Day.

Not Christmas Day, Family Day. Somebody in Google's office in Australia, it wasn't any other country that I'm aware of, made the decision that Christmas Day was not inclusive and that Family Day was a better title.

They've since changed it back, you'll be interested to know. But at least for this one person and sufficiently that it made it onto the internet, the course for inclusion, the course for being more open-minded, is the removal of all things Christian.

[ 2 : 30 ] Over the past few months in our country and in our city, because of the new plebiscite, you will remember that there has been a chorus in our political landscape declaring that faith and religion must be removed from the political and the public sphere.

You can have your faith, you can believe in Jesus, just shut up about it. And don't let it come into our decision-making. Don't force it on anyone else. Now, aside from the fact that that completely misunderstands what it is to have faith and to believe in a Christ who came and entered in and gives us hope for more than this life, it's interesting that the particular religion that needs to be removed, at least in our context, is Christianity.

That's the one that can't have a voice because it's the one that rubs against the grain of the culture that we exist in. Over the past few years, you may also remember an enthusiastic little lobby group known as FIIRUS.

It's creatively titled Fairness in Religion in Schools, which is a euphemism for Stop Teaching Kids About Jesus. Aside from the fact that scripture or religious education in schools is completely voluntary, the accusation by this group is that the teaching of Christianity is oppressive and harmful and shouldn't be taught to teenagers in schools.

It would be fair to say, just these examples and there's plenty more, that if you are a Christian and you are listening to the world around you, the message that you're getting is, keep your faith to

yourself.

[ 4 : 11 ] If you want to believe in Jesus, it stays in your house, it stays in your head, it's not something for public consumption. And yet, as you hear that message, and you turn up to church on a Sunday, you go to your community group, you open the Bible, you are also hearing the message, in fact, the command from God's Word, to be light in the world, to declare the hope of the Gospel.

At best, we're living in a tension. At worst, you might be living in a deep confusion and discouragement.

So how do we live, as Christians, with that tension? How do we walk out of here with the enthusiasm of being gathered with God's people, and the encouragement of the Gospel, and the hope we have for Heaven, into a world that not only doesn't want to hear it, but may even persecute us for what we believe?

How do we live in a hostile environment? Well, 1 Peter is a letter written to Christians scattered throughout what is modern-day Turkey.

And we don't know how the Gospel got to these Christians exactly. It could have been people who were converted and travelled there. It could have been missionary journeys. But what we do know is that the Christians in those regions were beginning to experience the kind of hostility and isolation that maybe you're experiencing at the moment.

[ 5 : 40 ] The hostility from work colleagues, the being looked over for promotions, the avoidance of your neighbours, the isolation that comes from living in a culture that you just don't quite fit into.

See, the culture in their day was heavily Roman. And so that meant that social interaction for them was heavily tied up in pagan rituals. So you would gather and you would have your feasts around different festivals and sacrifices.

Your day-to-day existence was dependent on the willingness of your neighbours, the people you lived around, being willing to trade with you, being willing to buy from you, being willing to sell to you.

And these Christians were experiencing the beginnings of what would become a bloody and severe persecution. It's before it gets to its worst.

In the following decades, the Emperor Nero would unleash one of the bloodiest persecutions of the Christian church that history will ever know. And so these Christians, as the hostility slowly ramped up, were understandably tempted to compromise, tempted to adjust, tempted to keep their faith to themselves, tempted to modernise what they believed and maybe include some of these other religious festivals with the Jesus that they were trying to follow.

[ 7 : 05 ] And so Peter writes a message to these Christians and it's a message that you and I need today and every day until Jesus calls us home. It's a message we need because the reality is we're in the middle of similar pressures.

I'm almost reluctant to use the word persecution. I think that some of our brothers and sisters in the world who follow Jesus are experiencing persecution. We're maybe on the beginning of a path of hostility, but it's getting harder.

And it's going to get harder. So how do we live in a world that is hostile? First, remember who you are.

Remember who you are. Before we focus too much on the world out there and how to engage them, on the circumstances, the culture we live in, we need to take stock of who we are.

We need clarity on our identity as followers of Jesus because it's just as significant a factor in how we live and how we experience our lives as anything that can externally influence you.

[ 8 : 12 ] I mean, this is simple science. Any reaction is dependent on two elements. If you have just petrol, it's fine. Petrol and fire equals explosion.

Petrol and water, just a mess. Any reaction is dependent on what both elements bring to the conversation. And so even though the world around us might feel like a flame, might feel hostile, might feel angry, that's only an issue if we're a flammable element.

That's only an issue if we come to that fire as paper, with a flimsy identity that's easily burned and easily consumed.

If we're paper, we should be worried. We should be avoiding the world. We should be fleeing to the hills. But if we're gold, then the flame is for our benefit.

The flame is a good thing. The flame is something to be pursued. It purifies us. It strengthens us. So the first question we need to ask as we begin to experience hostility in the world that we live in is what are we made of?

[ 9 : 32 ] What are we made of? So if you're a Christian, who are you? Verse 1 there in 1 Peter 1, that Jess read out for us. See, you could stop after three words there.

If you are a Christian, you are God's elect. That means you are chosen. He chose you before the creation of the world.

Before He'd made all that we experience and enjoy, He'd already chosen to do Christmas. He'd already decided He was going to send His Son for you specifically.

And now by the power of His Spirit, He has made you His. You belong to Him. You are His possession. He chose you to be somebody who is at home with Him, who is more comfortable with Him.

He chose you for something more than this world, something better. In chapter 2 of 1 Peter, He goes on to say that He made Christians to be a holy nation.

[ 10 : 54 ] That means to be set apart for something else. He made Christians to be a royal priesthood, meaning that they are representative of something else, representative of the new home, the new identity that He has purchased for them.

If you are a Christian, this is not your home. This is not your home.

You do not belong here. And the upside of that is God has chosen you for something better. And so we need to hope for something better.

Have a look at verse 3. You could just re-read those verses over and over.

The hope that Jesus has purchased for you through His death and resurrection is a living hope. It's a hope that is so substantial, it will continue to grow as you begin to see more of how good God is.

[ 12 : 12 ] It is a hope that cannot perish, spoil or fade. See, before Jesus, every single human individual's life has the same boundary.

Death. That's the end point. For every single human without Jesus, because people reject God and ignore Him, we're unworthy of heaven. And so the offer of eternal life, the offer of life for more than just your 80, 90, 100 years, is actually off the table.

We all have the same fences. You're born, you grow up, you work, you play, and then you die. It's all over. You can't take anything with you. Finished. And so if that's it, then we should eat, drink and be merry.

We should spend our lives trying to squeeze everything out of it that we can, collecting experiences, collecting stuff, doing whatever we can to get as much enjoyment as possible out of right now.

But, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who's given us new birth into a living hope. See, because Jesus rose again, because He's not still in the grave, He proved that He's more powerful than death.

[ 13 : 31 ] He proved that when we trust Him with our lives, when we follow Him with everything that we've got, we get reborn. We get a new life.

We get a hope that lasts well beyond the death, well beyond 80, 90, 100. It's a living hope that doesn't perish, that doesn't spoil, that doesn't fade. If you are a Christian, you have been chosen for unending life.

Death is not your finish line. And so that changes how we experience right now. If you are not a Christian, the hope that Jesus offers, the reason that He bothered to come as a baby at Christmas, the reason He lived and died and rose again, is so that death would not be your finish line.

So that you could stand in the face of sickness, in the face of death, in the face of rust and decay, and know that nothing can take the eternal life that Jesus offers from you.

this inheritance, verse 4, is kept in heaven for you. No one can take it from you. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

[ 15 : 00 ] The inheritance that reshapes our whole existence and our perspective on our circumstances, that even reshapes us, the thing that we hope for, the thing that we look forward to, our hope is for salvation.

That's what draws us forward. That's not just avoiding death. It's at least that. But the salvation that God offers is himself.

The thing God is keeping for you in heaven is a place with him. God is shielding people, his people, for himself.

So in verse 5 there, it's salvation that will be revealed. But if you skip down to verse 7, it talks about our refined faith being to the praise of God. When?

What is revealed? Jesus Christ. Salvation is not some abstract concept where you just get set free. The salvation that God offers is a relationship with him.

[16:13] An unhindered relationship. A face-to-face relationship. The eternal life that God has purchased through the death of his son Jesus is not just living forever.

forever. It's life plugged into the limitless source of life and goodness, God himself. It's life in an unhindered relationship with God through Jesus.

See, the unfading inheritance of God's elect, the thing that we hope for, the thing that transforms the way we experience hostility in this world, is the secure salvation of a place that's prepared for us in heaven.

It's the confidence we have that because Jesus died and rose again, not only does God love us, not only is death defeated, but our names are written in heaven.

There is a specific place that God has prepared for you that no one else can take and not only is God preparing that place for when you get there, but he is shielding you every step of the way from now until then.

[17:31] it may be hostile, but as God's chosen people, we're protected, we're secure, and our inheritance can never perish, spoil, or fade.

How do we live in this hostile world? Remember whose you are. You're God's chosen who chose you and who gave you new birth through the resurrection of his son.

Remember who you are, God's chosen son or daughter with a glorious inheritance that awaits you. In hostility, remember who you are.

In adversity, remember who you are. Even in prosperity, remember you were chosen. You have a living hope.

Remember who you are, and the second thing is, remember where you are. Remember where you are. So Peter is writing this letter to a diverse group of people scattered across a big geographical area.

[18:47] Their cities would have been distinct in these different provinces, the way they functioned and operated, but he still addresses them all with that title elect and then exile.

Elect is who they are, exile is where they are. Now exile is a big Old Testament word. In the Old Testament exile talks about the time where God's people Israel after repeatedly disobeying God and worshipping idols and bowing down to false gods, finally they are taken into exile or captivity by the Babylonian army.

So exile is where they're removed from their country, from their homeland and dumped into this new place, they're forced to live in this new place without their culture, without their routines.

So exile is usually politically motivated. In this case, the idea was that if you take Israel away from their home and you dilute them into the Babylonian culture, what you do is you weaken them as a nation.

You take away the things that make them them and you dissolve the culture and the values. That's Old Testament exile for Israel. Now, Peter's not just writing to Jewish people here.

[20:04] There might have been some Jews in these provinces, but he's not writing to just Jewish people. These people, and you and I come from a whole bunch of different countries and ethnic backgrounds, these people are not in geographic exile like Israel was, they're all spread out.

Now, I'm not aware of anyone in this room who is in geographic exile, although you might be, but the point is for these people and for us is that they're exiled because of who they now are.

Now that they're God's chosen people, now that their hope is a living hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus, their home is now with God in heaven. That's where they belong.

That's their defining reality. That's their passport. They don't belong in this world. They are in exile in this world. And so if you are a Christian, your inheritance and your hope and your identity, your citizenship is in heaven with God.

That's where you belong. That's what you're looking forward to. That's why you feel frustrated about the world that we live in and the things that are wrong with it because you know you were made for something better.

[ 21 : 23 ] Your exile is not Australia. It's this world, still full of sin and death and opposition. Now the whole concept of exile, and this is why this is really important for us, the whole concept of exile has built into it the hope or the longing for return.

While Israel was in Babylon, initially they longed to return home. They longed to go back to where they were from and where they were supposed to be. But then progressively they settled into the culture.

Some people became more Babylonian than Jewish. And at that point it ceases to be exile. It's just immigration. You've moved and you're in a new place and you've made yourself at home.

Exile has built into it that sense that I don't belong here. I want to be where I where I'm supposed to be. I want to be at home. And if you're a Christian, that home is heaven.

This is not heaven. I'm assuming that's not a newsflash for people. Even though there's plenty of good things that God blesses us with, even though Christmas is a joyful time, this is not heaven.

[ 22 : 46 ] And so as God's chosen people, as his elect, we need to cultivate, we need to embrace a holy discontent with where we live.

We need to look around the world that we are in and long for the something better that God is keeping for us. and that God is keeping us for.

We need to be very nervous, maybe even catch ourselves if all our dreams and hopes and aspirations are confined to what's going to happen to us within our lifespan on earth.

If that's all you're aiming for, maybe you've immigrated. Maybe you've forgotten where your home is. Maybe you've forgotten who you are. We need to cultivate and embrace a holy discontent and long for the better home that God's keeping for us.

Verse 6, in all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. One of the reasons we long for that future is because we know that where we are is temporary.

[ 24 : 04 ] We know that the suffering we experience, the loneliness, the sickness, the hurt, the pain, the death, it's temporary. It's fading. Even the blessing, even the good things we know that we have in this life are temporary.

But they're still real. It still hurts when we suffer. It's still unpleasant to be lonely or sick or to lose a loved one.

people. It's why Peter says you will suffer trials of many kinds. He's being pretty inclusive here. He's not saying that some of the trials in your life are supernatural spiritual opposition and other ones are just unlucky. That's not how life works. Life doesn't get compartmentalised into the spiritual stuff and then the other stuff.

our whole lives are part of a broad spiritual reality and so the trials may come in the form of demonic oppression or a crisis of faith.

[ 25 : 10 ] But equally they might come as sickness, financial struggle, relationship breakdown. Those are the tools that Satan loves to use.

They're the things that Satan loves to use to distract you from the hope that you have. To make you desire and pine for the comfort that the world can offer you right now. But later on in one Peter, he says, dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

when we forget we are in exile, we begin to wonder why there would be any difficulty in our lives. We begin to measure how happy God is with us by how smoothly our life is going.

Things are going well, so I must be honouring God. So, all of these things are tools that Satan would use to turn you away from God and to doubt his goodness.

But those struggles that we experience now, while we live in exile, serve an eternal purpose if we are followers of Jesus. Verse 7, these have come, the trials have come, so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[ 26 : 55 ] We're not paper in the face of hostility. We're gold that increases in purity and value as we get put under the trial of flame.

The reason, the purpose, the benefit of the trials that you will face, maybe that you're in right now. They're the Father's tools for refining you, for proving you and to ensuring that you finish the race. See, God in his incredible love has taken Satan's tools that would distract you, that would drag you away and he has transformed them into opportunities to grow you. Opportunities to strengthen you,

opportunities to increase your joy in him and to help you discover that in the grief and in the loss, Jesus is better.

That no matter what else happens, no matter what can be taken away from you, the inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, Jesus is more than sufficient. We are so wired as people to avoid suffering.

We're all about pain avoidance. We're conditioned to aim for the short-term solution, to fix it today and deal with tomorrow's consequences when we get there.

[ 28 : 18 ] We get frustrated with God when our lives are not running smoothly. Why are you allowing this, God? Why don't you help me, God? What have I done wrong, God? As if comfort was somehow a measure of God's approval.

Have we forgotten who we are? Have we forgotten that we are the ones chosen and purchased by the death of Jesus? Have we forgotten that we have a hope for heaven?

Have we forgotten that this is exile? That there should be a certain level of unpleasantness? Even if at its very base level it's just the fact that it's not yet heaven and we know that's where we're supposed to be?

Have we traded in the living hope and our unfading inheritance for temporary comfort? Now I'm not saying go looking for suffering.

You don't have to. Just follow Jesus. It'll find you. But the reality is there is a daily temptation for us. A daily temptation to forget the hope that we look forward to.

[ 29 : 33 ] To forget that God is shielding us by his power and so to compromise just to make ourselves a little bit more comfortable. To be not willing to admit that maybe we believe something different to the people we work with while there's a conversation about religion.

To maybe water down the gospel a little bit for those people who just it's too far. So we say things like yeah you can follow Jesus you're welcome to be part of our church and call yourself a Christian you don't have to change anything just come to church.

Rather than the message that God had to die because you are so ridiculously sinful and unworthy and he has a better life for you we just water it down because that's a bit offensive. Rather than declare the truth of the gospel that there is only one way to heaven and that is in Jesus Christ we say whatever you believe is fine.

There is a daily temptation for us to want to fit in and make this home. Temptation to make our life decisions based on what's going to be most comfortable right now instead of on the death and resurrection of Jesus and the eternal home that he's prepared for us.

If we start living like this is home there's a good chance that we will have traded our internal inheritance for this. If there's no difference between us and the world that we live in that should be a reason for concern.

[ 31 : 16 ] I was having a conversation with a man at a funeral recently that we had here at St. Paul's. I'd never met the guy just having a conversation about stories about the man who had died. The man I was talking to was a non-Christian and I was telling him about the hopeful grief that our church family was experiencing and how our grief was tinged with joy because we celebrated that this man had been welcomed into his internal inheritance.

He was now home. The man looked at me a little confused and quickly explained that he was an atheist and he said that in the service instead he would find comfort in the past and in the fact that he knew the man at all for a few years.

This encounter reminded me just how differently I see the world from those who don't know Jesus. It reminded me that without Jesus the fence you have is death.

That's where it ends. That's all you've got and so you must find your joy before then. But because we know Jesus, because he is alive, this life is just the beginning.

So we do not grieve as those who are without hope. There is a finish line for us. There is an end to the exile.

[ 32 : 41 ] There is an end goal. Our living hope will one day be revealed. One day we won't have to put up with the sickness and the pain. We'll be face to face with Jesus. We'll be home. It'll be amazing.

But that doesn't mean that this life should be really sad and somber and that God has reserved all the joy for later on. Even now we rejoice.

Verse 6. In all this you greatly rejoice. Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. because of who we are even where we are we greatly rejoice.

Or verse 8. Though you have not seen him you love him even though you do not see him now you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

An inexpressible and glorious joy. For you are receiving the end result of your faith the salvation of your souls. Just let that sit for a second.

[ 33 : 52 ] Inexpressible and glorious joy. As we reflect on the opposition that we face in our lives that our brothers and sisters face around the world in far more severe situations than we are in all because they're followers of Jesus.

How do you rate on the inexpressible and glorious joy scale personally? How do we rate on that scale as a church?

And how do we do it better? Because the opposition and the trials are real. Pain and grief is a right response to some of the things that we're facing but how do we ensure that joy too is a mark of who we are in Jesus?

The keys there in verse 8. Though you have not seen him you love him and even though you do not see him now you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the end result of your faith the salvation of your souls.

the joy comes from him. Although we don't see Jesus yet we believe in him and we're filled with joy because we're receiving the end goal salvation which is just another way of saying we're receiving the end goal Jesus himself.

[ 35 : 35 ] That's where the joy is. The end is when we get him fully there's no more gaps we'll be face to face and we'll just be overwhelmed with a whole another level of inexpressible and glorious joy.

But right now as we trust in him as we remember whose we are as we remember that he sits on the throne that death is defeated that heaven is our home we begin to enjoy his goodness and his presence in our lives right now by his Holy Spirit through his comfort when we suffer through his patience and grace when we fail God is present with us in this exile lifting us out of despair filling us with joy in our living hope.

The rest of 1 Peter which again you can read in your own time goes on to say in light of that in light of who you are in light of where you are do good don't grow weary in doing good keep doing good love your enemy entrust yourself to God who is the real judge continue to do good serve declare the goodness and forgiveness of God in the face of opposition and do it filled with the joy that comes from a living hope.

How do you live in a world like this that may grow increasingly hostile as the years go on? remember who you are you are God's chosen people with an inheritance that will never perish spoil or fade kept in heaven for you you are shielded by God's power until the day you get to enjoy that inheritance remember where you are this is not home always keep lifting your eyes and remember where you are going cultivate that holy discontent and that longing for your heavenly home my prayer for you St. Paul's my brothers and sisters in the faith is that as you joyfully and boldly live out the hope of the gospel that the

God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while will himself respond to you and make you strong firm and steadfast to him be the power forever and ever amen that and