



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Grace and Peace

1 Peter 1:1–2

Dominic Rivera

January 15, 2017

series: Exiles: Hope Between Two Worlds

We are beginning a new series on the letter of 1 Peter called, "Exiles: Hope Between Two Worlds." Peter writes to several churches with the exhortation to live like Jesus in the midst of a world that did not know Jesus. To live like Jesus—to live different than the surrounding world—meant to be exiles, foreigners in a strangely familiar place.

Living in France we were constantly reminded that we were foreigners. You spend every day learning the customs, observing the culture, and finding how to make sense of life that seems somewhat familiar but it is entirely foreign. For example, places of business were not open between 12-2 pm. There were many times that we needed to go to the bank or a certain store and realized "we need to wait." Another example: dinner started at 8 pm and lasted 2-3 hours. Every day you could feel the difference between the world of who we were and the world around us.

Living as a foreigner means that you live between cultures, in the collision of competing values and lifestyles. That collision often becomes unsettling, leading to an evaluation of what truly matters and requiring a personal decision on how you will live in the midst of the competing voices. Seemingly every non-French person that we met went through some sort of culture shock. And not necessarily "shock" in the sense of basic differences between the cultures, but something much deeper. The shock was a re-evaluation of what you believe. Over and over we journeyed with people who deconstructed their faith, or began a pursuit of Jesus, or changed the course of their life. No one left unchanged, no matter how short their stay.

Peter is writing to people in a similar situation. They were Christians in cities and regions that were not predominantly Christian. They lived in a world with a plethora of deities and under a government that offered a message of hope different than Jesus. Peter's audience—much like for us today—are faced with a decision on where they will look for the core elements that will determine how they live.

As we start this series, it's important to take a few minutes to understand the cultural backdrop of the time at which Peter is writing. Peter writes this letter likely in the early 60s AD. He writes to a mix of Jewish and Gentile believers. They are living at a time in history when Rome ruled the world through Caesar.

The role of Caesar was not viewed simply as a political leader, but (Romans believed) embodied the divine in the world. As an example, listen to this inscription from 9 BC regarding the first

caesar, Augustus: "The providence which has ordered the whole of our life, showing concern and zeal, has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving it to Augustus, by filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men, and by sending in him, as it were, a savior for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease, to create order everywhere...the birthday of the god [Augustus] was the beginning for the world of the glad tidings that have come to men through him."

At the time of Peter's letter, Nero was Caesar. Nero was a narcissist and perhaps a tyrant. Here is an example of Nero's view of himself and his role: Nero wanted to build a house. Not simply a house, but a sprawling estate that covered 300 hundred acres. Rome was built on seven hills, and his estate would cover three of those hills. However, there was a problem: housing and commercial property resided in the place of his planned estate. In AD 64, a massive fire occurred in Rome that destroyed this housing and commercial property while, shockingly, leaving Nero's property untouched. Nero builds his estate, which included an artificial lake and a 120 foot statute of himself at the entrance.

One of the forms of mass media was money. Roman coins carried imperial theology. A few years ago, I bought a Roman coin issued during the reign of Nero, around the time of this letter by Peter. On the back is the shield held by Victory that was dedicated to Augustus by the Senate and Roman People (S.P.Q.R.). On the front is the inscription (in shorthand): The Head of the Army, Nero, of the Julio-Claudian line, Emperor, Chief Priest, Head of State, and Father of his Country. Everywhere and everyone was reminded of the reign of Caesar, that Rome ruled the world, and that the only kingdom that matters is Rome.

The Christian message was profound and revolutionary—God was at work in the world, not through Caesar or Rome but through Jesus. When Christians begin to speak about the Lord, son of God, good news arriving in Jesus, they are challenging the pillar of imperial theology. When Paul writes to the church in Rome and says that you are saved not by Caesar, but by confessing that "Jesus is Lord," he is declaring that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar.

In this letter, Peter calls his audience to live in a new way, as followers of Jesus in the midst of a contrary worldview. But I don't want you to read this simply as a historical review of a religious movement under ancient Rome. Rather, Peter's words to the

early Christians have deep meaning for you as a student, wife, husband, family, employee, employer—for us as a church—as you seek to live like Jesus in this city and region.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, (1 Peter 1:1).

The letter begins by listing Peter as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is the same Peter who was one of Jesus' closest three disciples. He was also the one who was often outspoken or brash, he is the one who denied Jesus three times on the night before the crucifixion, and he is also the one who Jesus sought out after the resurrection and restored him in John 21. It's powerful to see Peter's identity not determined by his past mistakes, but linked to what Jesus had done for him and called him to do in the world.

Peter calls the believers, "elect-exiles." These terms should be understood together (contrary to NIV). "Elect-exiles" refers to their relationship to God and their relationship to the world. By "elect," Peter is referring to them as the people of God, chosen by His grace and design. "Exiles" refers to a person staying in a foreign place, sojourners, strangers in the world. There may be a sense in which Peter is highlighting what we may call a "spiritual" dynamic—for the follower of Jesus, this world is not their home as they look toward eternity with God, much like in Hebrews 11:13. But I think that Peter also wants to emphasize the difference between how God's people are to live and how the world operates. By living in the way of Jesus, these Christians would be foreigners compared to those in their city and region.

We'll get the sense as we read through this letter that Peter believes how Christians live is not some sort of moral check-off box. Rather, Peter writes as if living like Jesus could transform the world. That's important to note: by referring to exiles, neither Peter nor the message of the Bible is not promoting a rejection of the world. Instead, following Jesus means that we labor to bring a foretaste of the renewal that will one day come in full. It means to be the people of God **in** the world, but not **of** the world, yet very much **for** the world.

I have friends in Brussels who started a city-wide project to be a blessing in that place. It's called Serve the City, and has extended internationally and reached influential leaders. To be **in** the world, not **of** the world, but **for** the world.

Scattered

Peter describes his audience as "scattered." The word in Greek is *diaspora*, which means a dispersion. It's a term used for the Jewish Diaspora, when Israel was conquered first in part by the Assyrians (in 722 BC), and then completely by the Babylonians (587 BC). When the Assyrians conquered a nation, they scattered the local people throughout the empire. When the Babylonians conquered, they took the inhabitants captive. By Peter using the

term, he highlights the relationship between Christians and the surrounding world. As one commentator put it, "God's people in the midst of a godless world."

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia

Peter lists five regions in ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). These were colonized two decades earlier by the emperor, Claudius. Rome colonized regions by incorporating the local inhabitants into the Roman culture, sent slaves who were freed in order to populate the new territory, and gave land as a payment to military veterans. This would be a circular letter, read in these towns, and perhaps the route taken by the person carrying the letter.

who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: (v. 2a).

Peter then uses three phrases to describe the "chosen-ness" of the people of God. He does it through the roles of the God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son. Each person of the Trinity has a distinct action with a unified purpose.

The foreknowledge of the Father refers to His initiative and purpose from the beginning of time. The same idea is expressed in verse 20 regarding Jesus. God has been at work in their lives before they ever knew. The Father took the initiative to call them into relationship with Himself. This is a difficult concept to illustrate, but I thought of when I proposed to Hilary. We were in Vienna for a conference with several of the leaders from our church. I found a place for dinner reservations, booked tickets to a chamber orchestra concert that night, and that afternoon we visited Schönbrunn Palace. We walked up the hill to a view overlooking the city where I proposed. She didn't know of my plans, but they were in motion long before she was aware.

It's not a perfect illustration, but Peter is emphasizing God's initiative, God's purpose, God's design in the bringing these people into relationship with Himself.

The Spirit is the agent through whom the Father is at work in their lives. The Holy Spirit opened their eyes to see to the love of the Father for them, the Spirit transforms their lives to live in the way of Jesus and bring transformation in their world.

"Obedience" and "sprinkling [of blood]" are likely a reference to Exodus 24:5-8 and the covenant between God and Israel. In Exodus 24, Israel declares to God their desire to obey Him, and they are sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice to seal the covenant. But, as history progresses, their desire to obey was sabotaged by the inability to obey. The law could not transform their hearts from desire to reality. Peter writes of a new "obedience and sprinkling" as it relates to Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross makes possible the transformation of the human condition in order to obey and be in relationship with God.

In summation, Peter recalls the Father's initiation and eternal design, the Spirit opening their eyes to the call of their heavenly Father, and the renewal of the human condition to live in obedience in the way of Jesus.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance (v. 2b).

Now we get to the main point of this section, the first verb in these two verses. In light of everything that Peter just outlined about exiles, foreknowledge, sanctification, and obedience, here is what he wants to say to his hearers and what has hope for us today..."grace and peace be yours in abundance."

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. It is God's goodness toward people initiated by God, on His grounds, not merited by us. By "peace," he is speaking about the inward state when you're experiencing the goodness of God, the peace that is rooted in the goodness of God the Father, Spirit, and Son. Peter desires that they have this in abundance. It's already available to them in Jesus, but the reality of grace and peace can get blurred through the chaos of everyday life. These are core elements of what it means to be alive and live like Jesus.

There were competing offers of grace and peace. Rome offered grace and peace through Caesar. But that was faulty grace, a weak grace, a disappointment. Peter spoke of grace and peace flowing from the goodness of God the Father who has been at work in their lives before they were aware, God the Spirit who opened their eyes to the love of the Father for them, and God the Son who died for them.

This was available to them—to look to Jesus for grace and peace. And this is available to us as well. How they live as exiles in the collision of values and lifestyles will be driven by where they look for grace and peace. God has done a life-changing work in their lives and, as a result, is calling them to a new way of living in Jesus.

Tangible

What does this mean for us? As we seek to live in the way of Jesus in the midst of our culture, we need to start by examining our pursuit for grace and peace. You're going to have your choices of where to pursue grace and peace. There is Rome-type of grace and peace offered to you from a variety of places and people. And there is the enduring offering of grace and peace

through Jesus for you. In whom or in what you decide to give your life—to seek grace and peace—will determine how you live in the world.

Where you pursue grace and peace matters. The writer David Foster Wallace, writing from outside of the Christ-follower perspective, spoke of the danger of pursuit of the wrong thing: "There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough...Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you...Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out."

Where you look for grace and peace matters for at least two reasons. First, you could pursue something that will disappoint and deeply change you for the worse. Second, you could miss out on God who is the source of true grace and peace. The prophet Jeremiah said the same thing about ancient Israel and the human condition at large. He said that there are two evils: (1) people abandon God, the fountain of life, and (2) they fill the longing for life possessions, people, pursuits that will disappoint and, ultimately prove to be worthless. Jeremiah says that the entire world should shudder in the face of those two acts. And so should we.

Here is hope for you today: there is grace and peace for you in Jesus. Jesus offers you grace and peace flowing from the goodness of God the Father who has been at work in your life before you were aware, God the Spirit who opens your eyes to the love of the Father for you, and God the Son who died for you so that you could live in the way of Jesus.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1427-1S

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, January 15, 2017 at Central Peninsula Church South
1005 Shell Blvd. | Foster City, CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcweb.org. Additional copies available on request.