

# EXILES

LIVING IN HOPE  
1 & 2 PETER

SERMON TITLE: Always Be Prepared  
SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 3:8-17

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Identity is an ever-present buzzword. This should especially be true for Christians. We are chosen, loved, forgiven, and secure in Jesus. But Peter reminds us of another part of our Christian identity—we are exiles. The "world as it is" isn't our home. We are pilgrims on a journey, telling others along the way about the wonderful things God has done in calling us out of darkness and into his light. And just like Peter's personality, these two letters that share his name are bold invitations to cling to a living hope in the face of any suffering that may come our way.

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In the 4th century AD, the emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. And from that time up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity enjoyed a privileged position of influence in the Western World. For over 1500 years, Christian beliefs and values were imbedded into the culture. Christian morality determined the overarching moral structures of society. The church played a significant role in shaping the culture and the daily lives of its citizens. Some today refer to the last 1500 years as *Christendom*. Not that everyone was a Christian. But, Christianity was the *default religion* of the majority of the people in the Western world, especially in this country. *But all that has changed*. In the last 50-60 years, the *elite framework that drives our society*—news media, Hollywood, nearly all public education, politics—has pushed the Christian worldview from the center to the fringes.

My concern is that many Christians live day-to-day *thinking*. "Yeah, things are bad, *really bad*, but it'll all go back to "Christian normal" next year." But we're not going back. The fact is, we live in a society today in which an ever increasing number of people outside the church see what you and I believe as, *at best, irrelevant, and at worst, dangerous*. Fact is, we now belong to a distinct minority group and what we believe and how we live *will increasingly* be considered *strange* to the majority of the population in the days ahead.

And this new situation we find ourselves in is similar to that faced by the early Christians. During the *first* four centuries (*up until the emperor Constantine*) Christians met in house churches surrounded by neighbors and family members who scorned their beliefs and morality. And the apostle Peter wrote letters to help those hurting Christians understand what faithfulness to Jesus looks like in a world hostile to their faith. So we can learn a lot from him and them. We continue to today answering the question—*How do we live as faithful followers of Jesus in a culture that is growing more and more hostile to our faith?*

In our country today, it is your faith in Christ that makes you an exile. Your faithfulness to Christ makes you a target for slander and scorn. You, like Peter's friends, are "elect exiles" (1:1) and that means, you are not a victim of an unfortunate set of circumstances. *NO*, God has chosen you for such a time as this. *How then shall we live?* ...Listen to the wise counsel of the apostle Peter. Here's how we are to live faithful to Jesus in an ever increasing hostile world.

READ 1 Peter 3:8-17...

You can boil down the "big idea" of these verses to something like: *Do good and bless those who do bad to you. Do not swap insults with those who make life hard for you*. And Peter tells us that two things will happen as a result of living this way. He says, when you bless those who make life hard for you: (1) God will bless you (3:8-14a); and (2) God will give you opportunities to share your faith (3:14b-17).

In vv. 8-14a, Peter ties his idea of doing good and blessing those who make life hard for you back to his discussion about subversive submission in 2:13-3:7. Remember, submission is putting yourself under someone to do them good. Submission is influencing someone from underneath. In a world that's hostile to your faith, God calls his exile people to influence others from underneath. He says, when you bless those who make life hard for you, God will bless you (14). So, having the blessing

of God on your life is conditioned on how you speak to and about other people. Even your prayer life is conditioned on how you treat other people (3:7, 11).

In vv. 14b-17, Peter tells us that when you bless those who make life hard for you, God will give you opportunities to share your faith. God has put us here at this place and time to have gentle, respectful, well-reasoned conversations with people who don't know God. We should "always be prepared to make a defense to people who asks us why we believe and live the way we do. *Always being prepared* presupposes we are rubbing shoulders with people who may be antagonistic toward our faith. And, all believers are instructed to "always be prepared," not just the elders and leaders of the church. Every believer was expected to be able to put their faith and hope into words.

"Make a defense" paints a picture of a courtroom scene. In the book of Acts, we see that when the church first began, Peter and Paul and early Christians made bold Gospel *proclamations* in synagogues, on street corners, in market places, in arenas. *But now things have changed. A cultural shift has occurred and there's a shift from proclamation to testimony.* The world of the mid-first century church was much more hostile to toward "Christians" so that proclamation was rarely possible. So, again, there was a shift from proclamation to testimony. Or said another way: There was a shift from the judge's bench to the witness stand. A witness makes a "bid for truth" amid competing narratives and when the truth is contested. A witness makes a "bid for truth" then the jury makes a decision. In our day, as in Peter's day, we do not sit as judges—we sit as witnesses—witnesses giving testimony to the hope we've found in Jesus. And we offer hope rather than condemnation to people who don't know God or live the way God has designed. Seated in the witness stand we influence from underneath. God, the Judge, sits in the chair of dominance, not us. Here's the deal. For "testimonies" given by ordinary Christians in the first century, the church grew from the 1000s to the millions in a couple of hundred years. Well-lived lives led to well-reasoned conversations and *God added to the church those who were being saved.*

But the real focus for us here is one word, the word *prepared—always being prepared—always be ready* to testify—to make a "bid for truth" to those who are curious or confused about your faith in Christ. So, *are you prepared to have conversations with people whose beliefs and lifestyles are very different from yours?*

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### Discussion Starters

Keep the context in mind. *How do we live faithful to Jesus in the midst of a world that's growing more and more hostile to our faith?*

Have someone read 1 Peter 3:8-17

1. Focus on the vv. 8-14a—Ask: What do these verses teach about the kind of lifestyle God wants us to live? What are the biggest challenges you face in living this way? How are you doing with this at home? What about at work or with neighbors that have very different beliefs and lifestyles than you? What exactly does it mean to "do good and bless" people who make life hard for you? Give concrete examples. What do you think about the statement that "having God's blessing on your life (and your prayer life) is conditioned on how you treat other people?" Where is that in the text?
2. Focus on vv. 14b-17—Ask: What is the tie between the last passage and "always being prepared?" Are you afraid of people who have agendas that are making life harder for you and the future of our kids and grandkids? What does Peter say about that?
3. Talk about the idea of being *in the witness stand rather than in the judge's seat* with people whose beliefs and lifestyles you find offensive?
4. What is the hardest thing about having gentle, respectful, well-reasoned conversations with people who don't know God?
5. Are you prepared to have conversations with people whose beliefs and lifestyles are very different from yours? How can you start preparing?