

Evangelism as Exiles

1 Peter 1:1-2

Series: Loving God and Loving Others (Summer 2020)

Preaching Date: August 23, 2020

Topic: Loving God and others with our minds

Worship: Build Your Kingdom Here

Key Sentence: As exiles in this culture we can bring it good news

Outline:

Prologue: 1 Peter 1:1-2

I. The Hope of Glory (1 Peter 3:15) 1 Peter 1:3-5, 1 Peter 1:21

II. Fighting Fear with Fear, 1 Peter 1:17,

III. With Respect for All, 1 Peter 2:13-17 1 Peter 3:1-6

IV. Declaring His Praises, 1 Peter 2:9-10

V. Visibly Different, 1 Peter 2:11-12

VI. The Good News of Home, 1 Peter 4:8-10

1 Peter 1:1-2 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:20-21 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

1 Peter 2:13-17 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

1 Peter 3:1-6 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

1 Peter 4:8-10 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Evangelism as Exiles

1 Peter 1:1-2

This is the last week of our series on loving God and loving others with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The first week we looked at those verses in Mark 12, and saw that nothing could be better than to take seriously what Jesus says is most important. The second week we addressed, from 1 Peter 3, the need to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in us, to answer the hard questions people are asking about Christianity. Since then we've seen many ways to love God and love others. We've also looked at several good books, from the ancient *Practicing the Presence of God* to the classic *Knowing God*. But we haven't talked about the book that sparked this whole idea, a book on loving others with heart, head and hands that they may come to faith in Christ.

It's called *Evangelism as Exiles*, by Elliot Clark. For some years Clark was a missionary in the Muslim world. He found that being on mission there meant ministering as an exile, a stranger to that culture. But when he returned to America, he found that being on mission here was also ministering as an exile, a stranger to our culture. Clark found key principles for that ministry in the first letter of Peter. So today we're going to look at two books: Clark's book, *Evangelism as Exiles*, and Peter's book, 1st Peter. We'll see that as exiles in our own culture we can bring people good news from a far, spiritual country.

Clark's book has a prologue and six chapters, each with a key verse from 1st Peter. Thus the outline of today's message is Clark's, but the content of is Peter's. Let's begin with 1 Peter 1:1-2 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

Peter writes to the "elect exiles of the dispersion" across Asia Minor. Why does he address them this way? Clark points out that they are not literally exiles. They are, many of them, new believers living in their home country, speaking their own language, functioning in their native culture. Yet, Peter says, they are like the Jews who were dispersed by conquest into every part of the world. The Jews, by God's providence, had never adapted to the cultures and religions of the countries they went to. They had clung to that rarest of all religions, monotheism, and had stuck to the law of God for centuries. Peter says his first readers are more like those exiles, clinging to God in a foreign land, than they are to the natives of their birth countries.

How can this be? It's because they're believers. Paul says if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. He says we've been crucified with Christ, so we no longer live but he lives in us. Most pointedly he says "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." They were no longer citizens of Rome's empire, but of God's kingdom, exiles in their own land. In the same sense we are no longer citizens of the United States. For centuries people said that western culture or our country was "Christian." People shared much of the worldview of Christianity, gave nominal assent to Christian ethos and ethics, even passed laws to support, publicly at least, those values. But you and I know this is no longer true. In sixty years, with growing speed, we've developed a culture that calls Christian values not only outdated but harmful and dangerous. From the basic understanding of human nature to sexual ethics to political or economic choices, Christian thinking is discarded like wastepaper. We are exiles, not part of our culture. In this, Clark says, Peter shows us what's always been. "One of the essential lessons of 1 Peter is that this suffering and social exclusion is actually the most normal thing in the world. It is common for our brothers and sisters around the world today."

Peter's letter and Elliot Clark's book affirm that we reach culture not by conforming to the culture but by being radically different from it. Clark says his book addresses "how we live on mission when we're strangers and sojourners in our own land." "In the chapters that follow we'll consider six essential qualities of a Christian exile on mission. With the help of God's Spirit, such believers will be simultaneously (1) hope-filled yet (2) fearful. They will be (3) humble and respectful yet speak the gospel with (4) authority. They will live (5) a holy life, separate from the world, yet be incredibly (6) welcoming and loving in it. While these pairs of characteristics may appear contradictory, they are in fact complementary and necessary for our evangelism as exiles." Let's explore those three pairs, the ideas in Clark's six chapters.

First, he says, we're able to live and share good news as exiles because we have the hope of glory. The verse from 1st Peter he uses is one we earlier studied in this series, 1 Peter 3:15 *But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.* We'll refer to that verse later, but rather than study it now, I'd like to look at my favorite instance of hope in 1st Peter. After addressing the exiles, Peter says *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

“According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope.” God’s inner heart is mercy. We saw this when we studied the compassionate heart of Christ. We’ve also seen God’s heart of mercy in the word *hesed*. This is his undeserved love, when one who owes me nothing gives me everything. Yet when *hesed* is brought into New Testament Greek, it shows up more often as the word *mercy* than as the word *love*. God’s great mercy, his *hesed* toward us, has caused us to be born again. The initiative is God’s. This is obvious in the incarnation. “This then is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” When Jesus says “you must be born again” in John 3 he adds “That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

We are born again into a living hope. This hope lives in us now and sustains us, yet it is also a future hope. We have an inheritance “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,” a salvation ready to be fully revealed in the last time. Clark says “Such hope isn’t based in this life. It’s a hope settled on the certainty of the life to come.” Peter says in verse 21 that through Christ we are believers in God, “who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” God glorified the Son to give us, his children, hope for our own exile. We will be united with him in resurrection and glory.

This hope motivates evangelism. We tend not to speak of Jesus because we fear what we now call the “cancel” culture, that we will be ignored, disrespected, even derided for our outdated and dangerous faith. But when we have hope that goes beyond this life, we can be bold. People are drawn to a hope that survives what the world and our enemy throw at it. Clark tells of a man named Nuri, who became a believer when a dream sent him to a Christian in his town. Later he proclaimed Christ as a soldier in his country’s army. At one point he was beaten by his commander, and refusing to recant his faith, was left near death. Clark says “Two other soldiers who were looking on came to Nuri’s aid. They helped him inside. Nuri, apparently not having learned his lesson, proceeded to preach the gospel to them. And they believed. His hope in Christ was contagious. . . . When our hope is inexplicable, when it doesn’t make sense, that’s when people open their ears to hear what we have to say.”

Clark’s next chapter is about the contrasting element: fear. Fear, not of people but of God, is essential to our witness as exiles. He quotes 1st Peter 1:17 *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.*

After celebrating Christ's resurrection and our inheritance, Peter, in verses 13-16 of chapter 1 says that therefore believers should no longer live in the passions of their former ignorance but should strive to be holy as God is holy. Though we have the incredible privilege of calling on God as Father, we should not forget that a holy God judges each one's work impartially. Is Peter saying that salvation, or the keeping of your salvation is based on your works? Does God save us by grace but require good works and holiness to stay saved? No. If he did what good would grace be? Scripture teaches that by the works of the law no one will be saved, but that "Christ died for our sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God."

Yet there are three senses in which the judgment of God still motivates believers. One is a present sense. God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. Second, there is the loss of future rewards for believers when we pursue sin and forsake good works. Third, and this is key here, there is judgment for those who never turn to Christ, so we fear for them. Peter says "live your lives in reverent fear." Don't take advantage of your salvation either to indulge sin yourself or keep good news from the people around you. Clark says "Have we really taken into account the end and outcome for our friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers? Is our failure an issue of fearing too much, or not fearing nearly enough? Do we cherish our comfort and others' respect more than we cherish God's glory and their deliverance? Will we love them enough to fear for them, to show them mercy by warning them."

He tells the story of the pastor, Yusuf, at their church in a dangerous Muslim city. One day Yusuf was violently warned by the authorities that his church was an affront to Allah. The next day some of the same men walked into the church service as Yusuf began preaching. Rather than mute his message, he amplified his message to warn them. Clark says "Yusuf had taken inventory of the fear in the room and he decided to stock the shelves with an even greater fear: the coming judgment of God. His Spirit-filled boldness was amazing."

So believers on mission in exile will be first, hope-filled and second, rightly fearful, of God and for others. Third, they will evangelize with humility and respect. We could cite 1 Peter 3:15 which says to share our hope with gentleness and respect. But Clark points to 1 Peter 2:13-17 *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

We tend to think of Romans 13 as the only place we're taught to show respect for earthly authorities. But Peter says it as well. By showing that respect you silence the ignorance of foolish people. Peter doesn't limit this to government authority. He says "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." The word honor could well be translated "respect." Respect everyone, including brothers and sisters in Christ and government and other authorities. This will have an impact. In fact, to be effective, evangelism must be built on respect. We need to approach people as made in the image of God, worthy of care, concern, and deference. We love and respect people and offer the Gospel out of humility and fear for them. Clark gives the example of Aisha, a woman who had come to faith, the only believer in a remote village. Clark and his family went to the village to meet and encourage her. But her husband was not only a committed Muslim but a convicted felon. Clark says "That first evening our introduction to Metin went smoothly. He was anything but shy. . . . We talked at length about everything: the weather, his work, politics, religion, even art." The next day "Metin grilled up our kids' favorite: succulent lamb and spicy chicken wings . . . We spent hours together but never broached his run-in with the law. We just did our best to treat him as a person, someone we were happy to meet as the husband of our dear sister in Christ."

Metin eventually became a believer, which Clark attributes to the respect of his believing wife. 1 Peter 3:1-6. *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.*

Notice again the conjunction of fearing God but not fearing the other things that are frightening. Instead do good to those who "do not obey the word." Show gentleness and respect to those who need to embrace Christ. Focus on the inner reality of holiness. Clark says "While we might think Peter was asking a lot of these women, the reality is he expected the exact same character of all believers, even us, as we live as strangers and sojourners in this world. . . Such a character is critical for exiled evangelists." Showing respect to our rivals has a way of validating the Gospel. Many people won't be compelled to hear our sound arguments or persuasive evidence. Instead, their ears will only open when we demonstrate inexplicable kindness, meekness, and compassion.

Fourth, this respect is paired with boldness. 1 Peter 2:9-10 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* ¹⁰*Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

In 1st Peter 2, Peter frames our lives by Christ's example. He is the living stone, and we too are living stones. He is chosen by God and precious, but, rejected by men, he becomes the stone over which they stumble. Just as Christ was much more than what the people who rejected him could imagine, so the church is much more than the people around us, or we ourselves, can imagine: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. Peter tells us this so we'll be bold enough to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness as people who have received God's hesed, his mercy. The thing Clark does is to link authoritative evangelism with praise, with declaring His excellencies. "Simply put, God saved us to praise him."

So, although we approach people humbly and respect them as image-bearers, exiles do not refrain from boldly praising God for the truth of the Gospel. Clark tells the story of Meryem, an unbeliever who had asked online for a Bible. When they met her they realized she was a minor. Any evangelistic activity with minors could get them kicked out of the country or worse. "Meryem pressed us to speak with her then and there. 'How am I going to learn this? I don't know any Christians.' As she made her case, my wife and I looked at each other. This is why we had come. If there were ever a time to risk everything, this was it. So as Meryem's plea ended, I reached into my backpack and pulled out a Bible. Then together we reasoned with her about the good news of Jesus. . . I wanted her to understand the joy and forgiveness he brings to our lives. The urgency of the moment opened my mouth with praise, not stormy rhetoric." That's Peter's point. As exiles our citizenship is in heaven and we have a Savior, the glorified Lamb who was slain to ransom people for God from every tribe and nation. As we sing and speak the praises of his redeeming work, as we declare his excellencies, we bring good news to desperately needy cultures. We are ambassadors for Christ in a foreign land.

Clark's fifth point is that Gospel-focused exiles will live a holy life, visibly different from the culture and world around us. The text is 1 Peter 2:11-12 *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.* ¹²*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

One of Peter's main themes is that how we live makes a difference in evangelism. Too often in America the television preachers and mega church leaders have failed to practice what they preached. But Peter says that when the world sees your honorable behavior and your good deeds they will glorify God. Peter is almost quoting Jesus who said "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Nearly three years into our Harvey response, this is one of the most memorable things, that on Thursday nights especially we heard people from every background glorifying God for the help they had been freely given.

Clark tells the story of their neighbor, Asmin, who was a nurse at a local hospital. They got to know her well, and at one point Asmin invited Clark's wife to see her workplace. In the break room "Asmin introduced my wife as her American neighbor and friend, and as a Christian. However, she added 'Not the kind of Christian you think.' As doctors and orderlies peeked in, she explained how our family was honorable and kind. How my wife and daughters dressed modestly. How I was faithful in our marriage. How we were considerate and clean. We were Christians, but we were actually people of good character." Clark challenges us to embrace holiness for the sake of witness. He points out that "we may not be ashamed of Christ, but we might be ashamed of our greed, self-pity, anger, gluttony, jealousy, lust, or disrespect. . . The desire to reach others for Christ has a way of encouraging us to greater godliness. . . . We clean up our lives because we want others to believe and be saved."

Finally, despite the fact that we are holy and set apart from the world, we are also welcoming and loving in it. The text is 1 Peter 4:8-10. *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

Hospitality isn't a primary theme in 1st Peter, certainly not on a level with exile and suffering or hope and holiness. But it does figure centrally here. As Peter wraps up his teaching, he writes that "above all" they should love one another. Love was the crown jewel of their transformed lives. Love, in fact, lay behind every other instruction in the letter: to be humble and respect others, to not slander or revile, to walk in holiness, and to declare God's praises. That's because all Christian law is encapsulated in this one command, love. But between the command to love and another general command to serve, Peter gives one concrete example of how to express this love: show hospitality. It's as if being hospitable is a primary way he envisioned they would, through love, serve. Hospitality was crucial for mission in the early church.

Gospel messengers would travel from town to town with little provision. They depended on generous local believers for room and board. Homes were also the gathering place of early assemblies. Churches relied on members opening their homes for meetings and worship. Of course, that kind of glad generosity was directed primarily to believers. What does hospitality have to do with evangelism? Well, we'd be mistaken to assume Peter limited such kindness to only brothers and sisters in Christ. As Jesus said, our love and greeting should also be given to our enemies. The Christian call to hospitality includes a love for outsiders: strangers, foreigners, and the other. It implies sharing our homes with sinners. As such, the ministry of hospitality is essential for our evangelism. We studied this truth several years ago, referring primarily to the book by Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*.

Inviting others to our own tables can be a first step to an effective evangelism. People who would never cross the threshold of a church will still walk through your front door. People who are indifferent to religion or disinclined to Christianity may still appreciate a friendly dinner. Clark says "As we face increasing exile in our land, we'll need to rediscover hospitality for the sake of the gospel. Church attendance will likely continue to wane . . . Christian witness could be all but silenced in the workplace or classroom. Public spaces could suddenly become off-limits to religious conversation. But private homes will remain a haven for free speech, a place to introduce others to the gospel."

Furthermore, Clark says, "Christian hospitality is the reward of the gospel. It's a foretaste in this life of a shared inheritance in the next. It's a seat at the table now, the shadow of a future feast where we'll recline at table in the kingdom." He gives the example of Asma, a forsaken and impoverished young woman in Central Asia, who has left everything to follow Jesus, having lost her home, her father and her future. But in so doing she "gained countless siblings in Christ. She has a family in America who loves and prays for her. She also has a home thanks to a Canadian brother and sister in her city."

So what have we said? We are exiles. Our citizenship is in heaven. But we are here on a cross-cultural mission to bring the good news of Jesus into a broken world, a broken culture that is increasingly hostile. Clark says, Peter says, that we do it by being (1) hope-filled yet (2) fearful. (3) Humble and respectful, yet speak the gospel with (4) praise and authority. We live (5) a holy life, separate from the world, yet we are incredibly (6) welcoming and loving in it.

I've only touched the surface of 1st Peter, which is an incredibly rich book, and of *Evangelism as Exiles*. I encourage you to get both books, lay them side by side, and read them. As an exile in this culture you can bring it good news