



The Letters of James and Peter

Week 5 – 1 Peter 1:13 - 2:25

Day 1 - 1 Peter 1:13-25

Therefore, gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

“All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers, and the flower falls,

but the word of the Lord abides forever.”

That word is the good news which was preached to you.

Understanding the Passage:

Peter declares that what Jesus has done through the cross and resurrection makes his audience (now largely a gentile movement) a new people forever. He riddles his language with allusions to the Exodus and calling of Israel (Ex 12-15; Lev 11:44). Just as Israel was intended to be a holy family, called out of slavery, so now we are a new “holy” family, called out of our former passions. Holiness (Hebrew: *qodesh*; Greek: *hagios*) has moral and ritual implications, but in its most basic form, it means set apart or designated for a specific purpose. You could think of an operating room as holy. It has specific rules about who and what can be there and how everything should be properly cleaned – all for the purpose of bringing health in broken bodies. In the case of the Church, we are set apart and different from the

rest of the world for God's purposes just as God is different from the rest of the world. Here's what that looks like: "Having [made yourselves holy] **by** obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, so that you can love one another" (v. 22). In other words, submit to God's truth so you can love each other the way God loves. This love is most evident in Jesus' teaching, lifestyle, and sacrifice. Everything else Peter says will be based on the premise he is making here: we are a new holy family based on what God has done through Jesus in his death and resurrection. Nothing can undo what God has done because Jesus conquered death. This is why he brings us back to the promise from Isaiah 40. Everything else will fade away, but what God does lasts forever.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- What could the "passions of your former ignorance" be referencing?
- What does it mean for us to be holy?
- How does God define love?
- What does it mean to be born of imperishable seed?

Day 2 - 1 Peter 2:1-10

So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame."

To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe,

*"The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner," and
"A stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall";
for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

Understanding the Passage:

This passage starts with a therefore, so we see that whatever was in the previous passage has some sort of causation on our current text. The reality of what God has done and the call to be holy leads us to both give up divisive ways as well as pursue growth in our spiritual faith. It is important to remember that our faith is not just turning away from something bad, but ultimately it is running toward something, or rather someone, great. As Peter says, "Come to Him."

The sudden switch to masonry language can be confusing, but Peter is again thinking big picture. God's presence centered in the temple in the Old Testament, but the prophets picked up on something new God was doing. God never intended for his presence to be confined to a singular physical space on

earth. Rather his hope was to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory. Therefore, as Jesus has come and was the first stone of a new reality, now we are all the new building blocks of God's temple, carrying God's presence to the ends of the earth. So, if Jesus is the first stone, to us he is the hope on which everything else is built. However, for anyone who was expecting the move of God to be a warrior king, overthrowing Roman oppression and restoring Israel to a place of prominence, they would find Jesus to be a stumbling block (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14). God's vision was never to exalt a nation, but to draw all people to himself. Therefore, we are his representatives, declaring the truth of what he's done to all the dark places of the world, unifying a splintered world culture under the banner of Jesus' name.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How do you think chapter 1 gives cause for the start of chapter two?
- What does it look like to long for pure spiritual milk?
- What is the significance that we as a people are the temple of God?
- What does it mean that we, who were formerly not a people, are now God's people?

Day 3 - 1 Peter 2:11-12

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

Understanding the Passage:

There is a phrase in Latin that is attributed to St. Ambrose: *si fueris Rōmae, Rōmānō vivitō more*. While you probably don't know the Latin (and actually neither do I), you do probably know the common English proverbial translation: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Ambrose was giving good practical advice to Christians in the fourth century. He was saying that context matters. Everybody knows that to really connect with others, one needs to live by the community standards. A pastor living in a small town in Texas needs to go to the high school football games. If you want to build relationships with college students, you might want to drop by the coffee shop or Torchy's Tacos and enjoy a few laughs with the gang. And, if you work at the attorney's office where people work hard, then you work hard too.

But all along, you feel like you don't quite belong there. And you know that despite your desire to connect, there is a line not to cross. You don't do *everything* the Romans do. At the small-town football game, you don't join the crowd that boos the fifteen-year-old kid who fumbles twice. At the taco stand, you don't ogle the college girl with the tight t-shirt, and maybe one beer is enough. And at the attorney's office, when it's time to decide how the partner income is divided, you make sure everyone is getting their share, or maybe even more than their share, even if it means less for you.

So how do you know where the line is? You know it when you sense something "waging war on your soul." You know it when it is contrary to your core identity as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. That is what Peter means when he says we are aliens. We are to strive to live amid the Romans in Rome in such a way that they say, "Hmmm. There's something different about that person. One of us, but not quite one of us..." and maybe they will see what God can do.

We usually think of "the desires of the flesh" as sex, or maybe hunger for food or drink. But the Biblical meaning of "flesh" doesn't have to do with physical appetites. "The flesh" in Scripture means that base

nature in us, the corrupted and still unredeemed drives of greed and envy and lust and ambition and hatred and fear. Sometimes those show up in sex, but often it is something else. So “abstaining” isn’t easy. But it makes a difference down in the soul, and it shows others all that God’s love can do.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Do you feel like an alien or exile in the culture in which you live?
- When have you crossed the line, or felt tempted to give in to the lifestyle in your culture that wages war against your soul?

Day 4 - 1 Peter 2:13-17

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Understanding the Passage:

To understand this passage and everything that follows, we have to keep everything we’ve learned so far in the forefront of our minds. We are God’s holy people, bought by the suffering of Jesus on the cross and maintaining hope in his resurrection and return. Therefore, we don’t belong to the world around us, but rather we are representatives of the heavenly Kingdom. In this manner we submit ourselves to every human authority and institution. Everything in the sections that follow are not an endorsement of the way things are but rather a call to live holy in the midst of those circumstances, even when those circumstances and cultural norms are oppressive. When we do maintain a standard of holy love and submission to God in the face of darkness, our good deeds shine the brightest. This is how we silence opposition. Just to remind ourselves of what this opposition looked like, the first call here is to honor the emperor and his governors. These rulers were not simply annoyed or displeased with Christians; they were actively persecuting Christians. If you read the things Nero was doing at the time, feeding Christians to wild animals in the Colosseum sounds like mercy. Peter himself was crucified upside down following his Savior to the grave. We have every freedom in Christ, but we willingly give it up for the sake of loving our neighbor. The contrast created when Christians live out a culture of honor and respect toward their enemies is truly counter cultural, and we can begin to believe the stories of people jumping out of the stands in the gladiatorial rings to die alongside the martyrs, who lived for a kingdom so radically different from their own.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How do we view submission to authority and institution in our culture?
- How does Peter’s appeal to submit to a hostile empire challenge the way we think as Americans?
- What would it look like to silence the foolish by doing good in your world?
- What does it mean to live as free people and as God’s slaves?

Day 5 - 1 Peter 2:18-25

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Understanding the Passage:

This passage is best understood in light of what comes before. Peter is appealing to his audience to live in a manner that speaks of God's character in the midst of a culture that oppresses humanity in multiple ways. Here he addresses the institution of slavery, and let's be clear, Peter is not endorsing slavery. From the Genesis to Revelation, Scripture does not embrace slavery. It accommodates a broken culture at times and speaks to a people who know slavery as a norm of how the world works. However, even in those places it reminds its listeners of the humanity of slaves, and inherent in Scripture's view of all humanity is the *imago dei* (Gen 1:26-27). All humanity bears the image of God and all are seen as equals before God (Gal 3:28). That being said, God's mode of transforming the world is not revolt but love. So here, we see the standard of holiness set to love our neighbor, even when they are overbearing slave owners. Here Peter actually qualifies the blessing on suffering – only in suffering for righteousness sake is there a blessing (Matt 5:10-13). There may be human honor for suffering with a streak of rebellion, but God's approval waits for those who act and work with integrity. Why? Because Christians serve a higher cause than the rest of humanity, and they follow a higher example, namely Jesus. Peter traces Jesus' sufferings as they are practically listed out in Isaiah 53, but he notes to what end. The end is to bear our sin, so that we might return to Him. This is the end to which we serve and love and suffer – to draw another's soul to Christ.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- Imagine yourself in a slave's position. How would you hear Peter's appeal to submit to an overbearing master? How would it feel to love your master?
- Without belittling the text, what are areas of life we endure difficult or oppressive circumstances for Christ? If you cannot think of any, be bold enough to consider any ways our culture may create oppressive circumstances for others.
- How might we imitate Jesus in giving up our freedom for the sake of loving a neighbor?