

Victory of the Lamb – March 22, 2020 – The Way of the Exile

1 Peter 2:13-25 and 1 Peter 3:1-14 - Hope Under Pressure – Pastor Bill Limmer

We are living in strange times, aren't we? There is disequilibrium. There are new phrases like "social distancing." There are new realities. You go to the grocery store and the shelves are empty. You go to Costco and instead of toilet paper being stacked to the ceiling, the pallets are empty. People are working from home. If you are still working in your office downtown, the commute is traffic-free. Homeschooling is now for everyone, not just a few. There are no play dates. No live entertainment or sports in person or on TV. Going out to eat means getting in the car and taking the family through the drive-through.

Today we are continuing our series on the New Testament book of 1 Peter, a series we are calling **The Way of the Exile**. Little did we know when our creative team was working on this series that we would be worship together from . . . a distance. Like we have done with the previous messages in this series we are going to go back to first century check out their context so we can see what the Bible is really saying and then bring it back home and apply the message to us today.

Remember, Peter is writing this to Christians who are exiles. The Roman Emperor Nero deported them not only to a new land but to a new cultural setting. Nero's kingdom was built on power and prestige. It was an iron fist. They had peace but it was a peace brought to you by the power of the sword. Jesus, of course, has a kingdom of peace too. But Jesus kingdom of peace is built on sacrifice and love. So, his original hearers were living in a time of extreme conflict and tension. They were living in circumstances that they had no control over. Their sensibilities are in the spin cycle of a new normal. Can you relate?

In the section of the Bible before us today, Peter encourages three different groups of people: citizens, slaves, and women, who were all asking the same question: **How do we live well under the rules of the game we didn't choose but can't change?** As we consider these words, imagine the citizens doing a Zoom meeting and asking the question, "What do we do with the Emperor who is blaming us for the fire in Rome?" Imagine the slaves have their own Slack meeting and asking, "What do we do because our owners are absolutely ruthless?" And then there is the Christian wives FB group and they are asking what do we do with our unconverted husbands, because they hold the power of life and death over us. They can kick us out at any time, what do we do?" Make no mistake about it... this was a very emotionally heavy and trying time.

So, let's begin by looking at the first group: The citizens. As I read these words, remember that Nero is in charge. And Nero couldn't stand Christians. He made Christians out to be the scapegoat for the fire he set so he could enlarge his own personal territory. This is the same Nero who dipped Christians in tar, hung them up on poles, and then set them on fire so they could have light for late night Chariot races. **1 Peter 2:13-17 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.**

What are the Christian citizens to do about that persecuting, fire setting, murderous government? Peter tells the Christians to submit, to obey, to support, and to do good. To do good in this setting meant if

you have resources use them to build up the infrastructure, build roads, support the building of civic establishments like zoos and pools. Really?

Why live like this? Because you belong to the kingdom of Jesus, a kingdom of peace through self-sacrifice and love. Because if you do good you will silence the talk of the ignorant and the foolish. Do all of this so that when the people go home at night, they are either shaking their heads in disbelief because of your kindness in the face of persecution and/or they are so thankful that Christians are a part of their community. It is a lot like what Jeremiah said to the exiles in captivity 700 years before this, set up roots, have families, make the city flourish. Today and at this time, Peter would tell us, if at all possible, support your civic organization and communities, don't separate from them. Don't set up an us versus them. Be **children** of God in the **middle** of whatever you are in the **middle** of.

The second group: Slaves. (1 Peter 2:18-20) **Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.** ¹⁹ **For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.** ²⁰ **But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.** Now if you are not an African American, you and I probably have no idea how painful these verses are. But know two things about these verses: 1. These verses are talking about temporal and situational settings. These verses are not talking about permission for slavery but a coping mechanism for those who are enslaved and 2. Roman slavery was far removed from the ugly racial slavery of the American South. Roman slavery was not raced based but often people would end up in slavery as captives of war or by hard economic choice. Roman slaves were often better educated than their masters, could acquire property, buy their freedom, marry whom they wish, and they had some protection under the law. Another way that we could look at these household slaves is that they were employees.

Peter says to these slaves who didn't choose the rules but couldn't change them to see themselves as free in the Lord, but to submit to the obligations of their position in society. Christianity was not to be a revolutionary political or economic movement. What made Christians Christian is their relationship with Jesus Christ. A relationship where we get strength through Jesus to live a self-sacrificial and loving life knowing that God sees your suffering.

He encourages them to live like this so that you can be an influence. (Ephesians 6:5-8) **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.** ⁶ **Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.** ⁷ **Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people,** ⁸ **because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.** And so, the same is true for us. When we go to work, we may have to answer to earthly employers, but we in all reality are really working for the Lord. So do your best.

Third group: Wives. (1 Peter 3:1-4) **Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,** ² **when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.** ³ **Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.** ⁴ **Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.** Like with the previous section on slaves don't take 21st

sensibilities and thrust back on the first century. In the first century setting, marriage didn't have romance like ours. Husbands were often promiscuous, and wives were to bear children. Wives were not to have friends that were not their husband's friends, they were not to have gods other than the gods their husbands had. In this setting, the typical Roman wife would try to gain access to her husband's emotion, treatment, and respect by elaborate hairstyles. I would show you how that looks but . . . I'm kind of stuck. Peter says, **Wives submit with an inner beauty, a tranquil spirit, a Christ like spirit in a godless marriage.** The desired result is that by an inner beauty and a spirit of Christ like sacrifice their husband's would be changed.

But what if all this stuff the citizens, the slaves and the wives were to do, didn't work? What then? Ready for it. Then Peter says, "Suffer well don't become bitter." Suffer well, don't gossip. Suffer well don't rip on someone on social media. Suffer well, don't harbor anger in your heart.

And so here we are today. How do we live well when we didn't choose the rules of this pandemic, but we can't change them? It is hurting us all people, whether Christian or not. And to be fair, some more than others. Some may lose hours, some may lose jobs, some already have. It may be hard to find basic needs. So I don't say any of this lightly. Suffer well. Don't become bitter.

How do you do that? This is so good. Jesus has left you an example. 1 Peter 2:21 **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.** ²² **"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."** ²³ **When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.** ²⁴ **"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."** ²⁵ **For "you were like sheep going astray,"^[1] but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.** So how do we do live when we are put into circumstances that were not our choosing, but we can't change. Just like Jesus. Jesus knows what is like to be an exile: He was exiled from heaven to earth, he remained calm in the missile of false accusations. He trusted God saw all that was going and that he had plan of redemption that he was working out. He was exiled from perfection to sin, exiled from life to death.

We are to live like Jesus. We are to humble ourselves, think of others greater than ourselves, serve the down and out, submit to one another, we pray, and we love.

The word "example" here is the word that means to trace over. Did you ever do any tracing in grade school? I did. I wasn't a very good artist. The only way I had a chance to draw something beautiful was to trace. You may be a good artist, but I want you to know we are all sinful and the only way that we have a chance to look like Christ, is to **trace your life over Jesus.** So Holy Spirit take our hearts and help us trace out Jesus in lives.

And here is the good news: while we are tracing over the life of Jesus, we will be reminded that He is our refuge and strength an ever-present help in time of trouble. We will trace over Jesus remember or find out that he and his grace and mercy never fail. As we trace over Jesus and remember he is with us always even to the very end of the age. We will trace over Jesus and remember that he is working through everything, even things we don't understand for the good of His kingdom in which he wants all people to be saved. We will trace over Jesus and realize he is God and we are not. He is in control even when we are not. As we trace over Jesus' life, we will find ourselves at the cross where his blood was poured out to cover you and me and forgive all of our sins. When we trace over Jesus, we will remember

this truth: **Thanks be to God, He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** (1 Corinthians 15:57) When we are tracing over Jesus, we will see that all of God's promises are yes in Jesus. And that gives us hope under pressure.