

Series: First Peter

Living in Exile

Sermon by Lead Pastor Larry Renoe

First Peter 1:1-5, 2:11-13

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, September 15, 2024

Polly: Good morning, Waterstone. A reading from First Peter, chapter one, verses one through 5, and First Peter 2:11-12: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 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. Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” “Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits,” the word of the Lord.

Larry: First of all, isn’t that the most annoying sermon bumper video you have ever heard? Thank you, Polly, for that. That is the point, though. As you will see as we start this series through First Peter, we live in a pressured time. Two things as we get started, before we go into God’s word together. One is a ministry highlight. We are highlighting this month the ministry called Stephen Ministry. Yeah, it is an awesome ministry. We have had it here at Waterstone for a long time. Stephen Ministry is named after one of the first deacons in the early church, Stephen, who cared for the widows in the Jerusalem church, and since that time, the church has been providing care for people on the hardest days of their lives. Stephen Ministry, you will be assigned to another person who has gone through fifty hours of training. They are awesome listeners. They pray. They know God’s word, but most of all, what we have found over the years is while we can’t prevent suffering, we can prevent anyone from going through suffering alone. We believe in that divine math, right, $1 + 1 = 3$, and so if that is you this morning, going through some of the hardest times of your life, maybe you have lost a loved one, lost a relationship, lost a job, whatever that loss is, and you would like someone just to talk it over with and have someone walk with you, out in the Hub we are going to have representatives from our Stephen Ministry. They have these shirts on that say, “God Cares.” Just stop and ask them about Stephen Ministry. Maybe you know someone in your life who could use a Stephen Minister. Please avail yourself of that.

Secondly, we are going to in our liturgy this morning, liturgy is a Latin word. It means the work of the people, and so we are going to do some work of prayer this morning. This past week was the twenty-third anniversary of one of the darkest days in our nation, when we mark the 9/11 tragedy, and so what I want us to do is to take a moment of quiet prayer and remember the families. I do not know about you, but I have watched some interviews. First of all, how many of you remember exactly where you were when that tragedy happened? Yeah, it is still there, still here, and I was watching some interviews of people who were just kids when it happened twenty-three years ago, who have grown up and now have become first responders themselves in New York and Washington, D.C., and still, though, what I noticed from the interviews is they could hardly talk. It was like it was yesterday, still the loss, the magnitude of the loss,

so let's take a moment of quiet, and let's pray for all the families of those who lost a loved one in D.C. and New York and in Pennsylvania. As well, let's also pray as the apostles Peter and Paul tell us, to pray for our king, our emperor, our president, all those in authority. Let us pray for them this morning as well, so let's take this quiet. Let's pray, and then I will close with a Psalm.

Lord, hear our prayers. We know from the book of Acts that Psalm Two was an essential part of the early church liturgy, and so we pray, "Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.' The one enthroned in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, 'I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.' I will proclaim the Lord's decree. He said to me, 'You are my Son. Today I have become your Father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. I will break them with a rod of iron. I will dash them to pieces like pottery.' Therefore, you kings be wise. Be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and trembling at his rule. Kiss the Son, or He will be angry, and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Amen.

Have you ever clicked out of a website reading the headlines of the morning, and you have read about another bombing in Palestine or another school shooting in suburbia and thought to yourself, "What kind of a world do we live in?" Have you ever been clicking through channels trying to find something to watch on any given night and seen scenes of violence and voyeurism and promiscuity and drunkenness, and that was the first five minutes of, "The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives," someone told me, but thought to yourself, "How low are we going to go?" Have you ever been driving home from school or from work after you have done everything you can to resist the gossip and the dishonesty and the laziness and the foul language and thought to yourself, "I really do not fit in here"? Have you ever suffered a tremendous loss in your life, loss of a relationship, loss of your health, and you have reached the point where you just throw your hands up, saying, "Lord, I am so ready for you to come get me"?

Last week I was having lunch with a young pastor over in Aurora, and he leads a small church, doing an awesome job, but one of the fun things he gets to do because the congregation is smaller is he actually polls the congregation a couple of times a year and asks them what they want him to preach on, and so one of the series they are doing this fall was from a number of different requests that came in words to this effect: "It is becoming difficult to live as a Christian in our culture. How do we navigate our culture?" What do you think? Do you feel some of that? I mean, we live in a culture today, a land with four million Muslims, six million Jews, two million Buddhists, and two million Hindus, and we celebrate and convict about religious freedom of course, but we also know that because each of those religions and Christianity have contradictory teachings, that they cannot all be right, and they all do not lead to knowing the true God. So how do we navigate faith in a culture of pluralism? How do we build relationships with our neighbors who have different beliefs than we do?

We know in our culture, our land, we are a long ways from the historic and Biblical definition of marriage, and we have seen in our culture the trivialization of human sexuality and gender, and yet we know that God has made everyone, and everyone has invaluable dignity, and so how do we navigate relationships with family and friends who choose relationships and lifestyles that we know in the end will not ultimately flourish for them, but yet, how do we love them and live Jesus before them?

I have seen some of the ways that Christians seek to navigate a pressurized culture. Many of us are afraid. We are especially afraid for our children and our grandchildren. This week I heard of a friend

who is teaching at a nearby school, and this second grader kept walking in and stumbling under the weight of their backpack. Finally, the teacher looked in the backpack, and there the kid every day was carrying a bulletproof vest to school. I have seen other Christians respond with anger, and the attitude is, “We are going to take our culture back, whatever it takes, politics, money, boycotts,” as if we have ever had the culture, but we are angry, and we are going to get it back. I have seen other Christians just be confused about what is right, what is wrong, what should we fight for, what should we let go? Then I have seen many Christians just get so weary of swimming upstream that the best thing they think they can do is withdraw from everything, just focus on me and my family and our life.

Peter has another suggestion for us. Today we begin a series on First Peter. We are calling it Clarity in Chaos. We all know much about the chaos of our current culture, but I believe that Peter’s wisdom taken directly, as we will see today from Jesus Himself, will give us tools to navigate our culture in the now, and that his teaching, as valuable as it was to a growing, fledgling Christian church in the Roman empire, is still relevant and applicable to Christians here in every culture in the twenty-first century. I believe this is going to change our church. I believe this is going to help us during election season. I believe we will not be the same after we spend time with the big fisherman, Peter. You say, “Larry, you say that about every series we do here.” Yes, but this time, I really mean it, yeah.

Here is the big idea of First Peter. We’ll put it in the form of a question. How do we live as God’s people in a culture that is becoming more difficult and more hostile, more pressurized towards followers of Christ? That is the subject of First Peter. How do we navigate a pressurized culture? Today, as we start the series, we are just going to really talk about one word, and I will give it to you, the word, “exile,” because one of the things we have to get right is a view of ourselves, our identity given from Jesus Himself. How do we view ourselves in this world? That is the starting point, and everything builds from there, so in a moment, we are going to talk about the word “exiles,” as Peter calls the church, but let’s look at the opening verses, First Peter 1:1 and 2. I just want to point out a couple of other important words as we now dive in. By the way, just so you can track with me as we go through, I am first going to define the word “exile,” in a moment, and then secondly, I am going to describe the word “exile,” and we will get a picture of it, and then lastly, we are going to talk about how do we have the strength to live as an exile, so the definition, the description, and then the strength to live as an exile.

So, to God’s elect, there is our word, exiles, scattered throughout the five Roman provinces there. By the way, what was happening here as Peter was writing was that those five Roman provinces are about the size of California, and they had just been conquered by the Roman emperor Claudius, and Claudius was doing a forced resettlement of Jews and Gentiles from Rome primarily, forcing them to go and live in this new province, resettling it, so there is a timeliness of this letter, and what those provinces are in that order, it was a trade route in which the church strategically planted churches, and this letter of First Peter was a circular letter that went around to these churches here, and wouldn’t you know it? By the third century these five provinces became the cradle of Christianity, the greatest movement in the history of the world.

So, this is Peter’s wisdom, and how they did it, much of it begins with knowing who we are, our identity. He says, “You are God’s elect.” I am going to save that for the end. We are going to talk about what it means to be chosen, so hold on to that, and then exiles, we are going to dive into that in a moment, but the word, “scattered,” is important here, too, and you notice that God sees the church and Christians scattered throughout the world. “Scattered,” you may have heard the word. We still use it today when we talk about Israel, the diaspora, the scattering of Israel around the world. The church is now here using the

same word, as Peter is deliberately saying, “Now the church is the people of God.” Just as Israel was in the First Testament, in this age, it is the church, and the church is scattered, on mission, and really the rest of First Peter will be about that word, “scattered,” our mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. So today I just want us to camp on the word “exiles,” because we have to know who we are if we’re going to navigate our culture well. We are exiles.

What is an exile? Well as is the case with most Greek words, it takes more than one English word to translate it well. Let me give you the definition. I think an exile as a good English translation would be resident aliens. In our world it would be someone who lives here but was not born here, did not grow up here, but they now have a green card or a visa. They lived somewhere for a longer time, but it is not their true home. So, I am drilling down further. With me, it is someone who is not a tourist. No, they engage, they learn the language, they get a house, they get a job, and they have a community. They are not tourists. They engage their neighborhood, but at the same time, they are not citizens, and so they do not have all the full benefits of citizens, and their neighbors, though they have a good relationship, they think they are strange, because they do not adopt all the cultures and practices and values here. They keep some of them from their homeland and their heart country, and so they are perceived as strangers, aliens, weird, and yet they live here, residents. Are you with me? Peter says that knowing who we are is the beginning of navigating a culture. Who are we? We are exiles. What does that mean? We are here. We engage, but it is not our true home. It is really not where we are from and not where we are going, but where are we going? Home.

Now there are some implications here. I want to start with one implication. What that means for resident aliens is that I want to resurrect a word that has been thrown into comedy movies, and I want to take it back for the church. We are pilgrims. We are pilgrims. We are here temporarily. We live here, we engage here, but we are not staying here. We are pilgrims. That means we have been forgiven. That means we are totally loved and accepted by God. That means it has been transformative in our lives, but here it is. It means that our Christian life here will not be totally satisfying. We are not home. That means there will be some things that we struggle with, that we just cannot get on top of. It means that we will have some emptiness at times. We will have some failures at times. We will have some deep disappointments at times, and we will have some losses, because we are not home. We are pilgrims. We are from somewhere else, and we are going somewhere else, but we are here, and we engage. Home. We are not home.

What is home? During the sabbatical that you graciously granted me, I spent a lot of time away from home. I slept in some of the most amazing places in the world. I am not kidding. I slept in Hawaii on Maui for ten nights. I slept in Breckenridge for a week. I slept in Pennsylvania for three weeks, but I did not sleep well. I was not home. I got home, and I slept in my bed of fifteen years that knows my body from head to toe, and I slept well, and I had my ten-pound Costco gel pillow that speaks to the arthritis in my neck. There is no place like home. Why? Because the bed knows me. I know where everything is. I have the fan for white noise, the right frequency fan as well. I sound like an old guy this morning. At home, everything is in its place, and everything fits. As believers, home, what is home? Home is a place where everything in our world is going to fit. It will. It will meet the deepest needs of our heart, and we will know complete love and complete rest. That is the home that is coming, but we are not home yet. How do we know it? Because every day we have reminders that we are not home, and I only have time to talk about one, but it is the main one, death. Death is the reminder daily that we are not home.

Think about this with me for just a moment. If the worldview of secular evolution was true and what we do in our lifetime is adapt and generation after generation, the irony of the secular evolutionary

worldview is that that seems to happen in a lot of ways and places. We adapt, we adapt, we adapt, but what does not happen is we never get comfortable with death. You would think that if secular evolution was true, that we would get to a point where, “Yeah, I had a good relationship. We had good love all that, but she died, and yeah, that is the way of the world. That is how it goes. That is reality.” We never get that comfortable with death.

Two nights ago, I want to share this with you both as an announcement and for prayer. The Haiku family lost a loved one, Lulu, 27 years old, their daughter of love died of cancer. Please pray for the Haiku family and Lulu’s little daughter Chloe, who is think is nine years old, but while we were all sitting around, one of Lulu’s closest friends kept walking around, going into the room and out of the room, and we were in hospice, and he would come out, and he would just start almost screaming, and I won’t say the word, but you will recognize it. He said, “This is B.S. This is B.S. This is B.S.” He must have said it twenty times through the night. Yes, it is. Why? Because we are not home. We were made for a place where God dwells from generation to generation. We were made to exist in the arms of God. So as long as death is present, it is an enemy, and it is a sign, the greatest sign that we are not home, so what do we do? We are exiles. We are pilgrims. Life here will not be completely satisfied, because not everything fits, especially death.

So, what do we do? Peter, in the next verses in First Peter chapter 2, verses 11 and 12, he gives us a description of how we live as exiles, how we are to navigate a culture in which we do not fully fit. He says, “Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and,” what is the word? Here it is again. Here it is again, “exiles,” to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives,” more on that in a minute, “among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.” Our first implication of being exiles is that we are pilgrims here, and it will never feel like home. Our second implication, though, is that we are to navigate our world uniquely, this way. We are to navigate it by living such good lives among the pagans. That is the mission. That is what Peter will be about, moving forward from here, but you notice there will be two responses. This is what I want to point out this morning. They will either accuse you of doing wrong, you will offend them, you will make them angry, the way you live the good life, or they will glorify God on the day He visits them. In other words, they will see the beauty of Christ in you and want to know it themselves, and they will meet Jesus.

Here it is; when we live as an exile, we will live a good life that will cause two responses at the same time in our life. There will be those who are deeply offended by how we live and the words we say when we talk about Jesus, and at the same time there will be those in our lives who say, “I need to hear more about that. I see the way you live. It looks like it has beauty to me, and I want to know that too,” both responses at the same time. We will be extraordinarily offensive and incredibly attractive all at once when we live the good life.

Now, what is the good life? Again, this will be much of First Peter, but I would say it this way. What I think Peter is doing is thinking about a sermon that he heard Jesus himself preach. We know it as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and in the Sermon on the Mount, what Jesus does is lay out the beautiful lifestyle of Jesus. You remember that it starts with this amazing, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are the merciful,” all these beautiful qualities. That is the Jesus life. That is living such a good life that people will have to respond to you.

Remember at the very end of that beatitude run, all the beauty, but then He says, “and blessed are those who are persecuted,” and you will be persecuted just like the prophets before you were persecuted when they lived a beautiful life and did such good things among the pagans, and this will cause you to be, and Jesus has these two amazing metaphors, salt of the earth. Remember salt, a preservative and a seasoning. You will offend, and you will attract, and then light, offend and attract, light. “Oh yes, I see light. That is too much. I prefer darkness,” and then at the very end of that section of Jesus’ sermon, we read this in Matthew 5:16: “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your,” what, “good deeds, and glorify your Father in heaven.” Those are the exact words that Peter has just written in chapter two, so that when followers of Jesus live this kind of life as exiles, they either deeply offend, or they deeply attract, all at the same time.

Now quickly, what does that look like? How does that happen? I once heard the late Tim Keller, deeply missed, Tim Keller in a sermon on the Sermon on the Mount. He once described it this way, and it has stuck with me. He said if you bubble up the Sermon on the Mount, and we begin to live this way, there are at least four main areas, a lot more, but at least four where we begin to deeply offend people and deeply attract people at the same time.

So first, forgiveness. You cannot read the Sermon on the Mount and not think, “Jesus wants me to be a person who forgives.” It is a theme again and again in the sermon. We need to be people who forgive. When that seed was planted, when Jesus spoke it, when Peter is writing here, that was an honor-and-shame culture. That was the fabric that kept society together. You either respected your neighbor by their merit, or you respected them by fear that if you did something against them, they would respond in kind, a fear-driven culture, honor-and-shame. Can you imagine what it would be like in a fear-driven culture, honor-and-shame, to have someone come in and start talking and living like this? “Oh, well you offend me. I will turn the other cheek. I will absorb it. I am not going to respond in kind.” Whoa. “Roman soldier, you want me to carry your pack one mile. How does two sound? How far are you going today?” Do not overcome evil with evil but overcome evil with good. “What are you talking about? That is not our world. That is not this culture,” in Jesus’ day. I mean, can you imagine how offensive that would be to some? Can you also imagine, especially if you are on the receiving end of it, how beautiful that might become, forgiveness?

How about this? A second one, when this bubbles up and becomes part of the Christian movement in the world, the second one would be generosity. In an honor-and-shame culture, you took care of your tribe. You were defined by race and blood, and anyone with your race and your blood, you would help them. If they were in a bad way, you would help. If it was anyone else, “not my problem.” Here come the Christian movement and the believers who would say, “I don’t care what your race is and what your blood is, because I believe in a foundational doctrine called the Imago Dei, the image of God. Every person has foundational dignity because they are a piece of work, God’s work, and so I will drop what I am doing, and I will give what I have to help you, regardless of your tribe and your blood.” Wow. Can you imagine how to some that would be deeply offensive, but how do others, “I need to know more about that.”

How about this? Thirdly, Christians came in, and in their movement, they had a really high value on marriage and sex. Now in the Greek world, Greek philosophy would tell you that you have to take care of your soul, your inner world, and you have to take care of your mind, your intellect, but the body, you will lose it someday. It does not matter what you do with your body. In fact, what you really should do with your body is use it as a tool for pleasure. That is Epicurean Greek philosophy.

By the way, we might think that is an old, three-thousand-year-old philosophy, but I am suggesting to you that Epicurean and Greek philosophy is as alive and well in our culture as it has ever been. In fact, one of the Bibles you can read about Epicurean Greek philosophy is called Rolling Stone magazine. I am not kidding you. I read an article there a couple of years ago. I clipped it out. It is about sex on college campuses, and I read the Greek philosophy in Rolling Stone magazine. Here is how it went. This is a college kid: "When I am hungry, I get a cheeseburger." "When I am horny, I find a willing partner." Sex is just sex. The body is just a tool for pleasure, and into this world comes a Christian movement that says "No, no, sex is made by God, and it has an owner's manual, and when you place it where it needs to go, within a marriage, and when you have sex within a marriage, what you are really doing is renewing your marriage vows, and you are saying 'I choose you again, and again, and I give myself to you completely,' and your body actually is a commitment apparatus." Wow. That is eye popping sex. Can you imagine how that would come across in a culture like that one? Deeply offensive, "But I might want to know a little bit more about that."

Lastly, the last one Keller gave was about death and suffering and how Christians throughout history, not always, but many throughout history, especially those who were persecuted, when they died, do you know how they died? They died singing. They died praying. They had such poise when they were in the midst of the hardest moment of their lives. Where does that come from? Our culture, their culture, no other culture can give that resource, how to suffer with poise, but there is a worldview that talks about a resurrection of a suffering one from the dead, and there may be resources there that teach us how to suffer, a resurrected savior. Do you see how that when you walk into a culture, and you bring this worldview with you, and when it gets persecuted, it only grows and grows and grows? Do you see how it can be offensive and attractive at the same time?

Before we move on and talk about how to get the strength to live that way, which helps us navigate the culture, I just want to ask you this, a little bit of personal application. How are you on being offensive? There are probably some of us here, because of personality, because of deep core beliefs, that we are probably pretty offensive all the time, and one just one thing I would have you meditate on this week, two questions. One, are you really being offensive about the right things? Two, if you are being offensive all the time, I applaud moments when you, like Jesus, walk into the temple and cleanse it, or you save your hardest words for the pastors who are leading your churches astray. I mean, there are things to get angry about and to be offensive about, but not everything. I mean, is it you all the time, and so one of the questions I would have for you, if you are offensive all the time, is this. Is it truth-telling, or is it self-righteousness? Is it talking about the name of Jesus, or is it just being stubborn? Wrestle with that.

There are others of us like me in this view, who are not offensive enough, who are much more on the beauty side, and I want to be like Jesus when He would hang out with the prostitutes and the tax collectors, not that He did not ever tell them the truth. I am not saying that, but I am saying there are places where you want to be, and you just want to fit in, and sometimes what helps you not to fit in is when you open your mouth and say, "but I know a guy is named Jesus who might be able to help you where you are," but I am often very reluctant to go there. I do not like to rock the boat. I don't want to get in a situation where I might have to offend someone by questioning. I would say to myself this week and to others here in the room, it takes courage to speak up, and often we want to say, "I also have compassion, so I do not want to speak up," but the question I would have for you is, "Is that compassion, or is that being a coward?" Wrestle with that as well.

It would seem to me that a healthy Christian at times is offensive in cleansing the temples and calling out pastors, and a healthy Christian at times is hanging with prostitutes and tax collectors, but we are always moving more towards the middle. We do not spend too much time on only one side, but we are always moving towards the middle more and knowing there are times when we need to speak the name of Jesus into a conversation. We have to. How else will they hear Jesus' name? There are other times when we need to not be so angry all the time about things that ultimately the king of the earth is going to deal with, not you. Let's live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse us of doing wrong, they also will give glory to God on the day He visits them. We are extraordinarily offensive, and we are incredibly attractive as we navigate this world as an exile, which leads to the last thing.

Where do we get the strength to do that? It's back in First Peter 1:1-2. It's from that word, "chosen," and this idea comes up again and again throughout First Peter, but I will just open the lid, pull the lid off a little bit on this. I would submit to you that when Peter was saying that we have been chosen, it is a way of saying that God loves us, that He chose us out of the world to be his children, that He loves us, because love is always choice, right? It is. Let me illustrate. In a marriage, if you have not been there yet, you will get there, you young married people. So, this is going to be free coaching today for marriages, but your spouse at some point, will come to you and say, "Do you love me?" and your answer is. Oh, come on people. "Of course I love you. Of course," and then the spouse will say, here it is. "Why do you love me?" Oh man, you are in big trouble right now.

Here is a way you could go. It is a way that I do not recommend, but often people go this way. "Why do I love you? I love you because you are beautiful. You are physically attractive, and I can't take my eyes off you." Someone is being wooed right here in the front row this morning. Wait, "I love you because you are athletic. I mean, on the pickleball court, no one can get within five points of you. You are a massive pickleball player," and thirdly, "I love you because of your intellect, the job, that you bring home the bacon. You are incredibly smart. The guy thinks, "Okay, I passed that test," but here is the problem with that path. Eventually, it may be that same day, or it may be ten years later, that spouse is going to look in the mirror one day and start to see what? A wrinkle, and that spouse someday is going to get a little bit of tendonitis in their elbow that hurts their forearm on pickleball, and someday that spouse, the intellect is going to get a little like, what should we say, slippery, and maybe not have the passion for work. In other words, if you go down that path, eventually the spouse would say, "Do you love me only for what I can do for you? Do you love me and put all your worth on me because of these things that I am now losing? Does that mean you do not love me anymore?" Of course, that is not what you are trying to say, so here is a better way.

How about this? What if you said something like, "Man, there are some things I really admire about you. I really do, and I know in the next, God willing, twenty, thirty, or forty years, that list is going to get longer and longer and longer of the things I admire about you, and the things that irritate me," but that is for another sermon, but, "Do you know the reason why I love you? I love you because I love you. I choose to love you, and then I bring everything in my character to make that choosing last. It is called a covenant. It is called unconditional love. It doesn't matter about the wrinkles or the tendonitis or the slippery mind. I made a choice, and my character says I will stay with that choice for as long as I live." That is the basis of marriage. That is unconditional love, and I am telling you, that is how God loves us.

In the First Testament, He said, "Israel, I choose you **not** because you are a great nation. You are a puny nation, and not because you are a righteous people. You are terribly sinful. I choose you, Israel, because I choose you," and the same is true of us in the church. We did not earn this at all. God simply

chose to love us, and then how does He bring his character behind all of this to prove it again and again and again that He loves us? That is where Jesus comes, in verse one, the sprinkling of his blood. You see, Jesus was home. He was deeply home. He was in the bosom of his Father and in community from all eternity with the Father and the Spirit, but He left home, and He came here. Do you know what He became? An exile. He became an exile for us. He wandered the earth. Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the son of Man has no place to lay his head. He became an exile for us, and He was forced out. He was extremely offensive and extremely attractive, but He was forced out of the city, and He died on a garbage dump hill. Why? Because on that hill, He became the ultimate exile. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”? Do you know why He became the ultimate exile and took on everything that we should have been in exile for? So that he could bring us home. “I will bring you home.” That is what gives us strength. To the degree that we see Jesus becoming the exile so that He could bring us home, to the degree we see that is the degree that we navigate our own pressurized culture with grace and love and mercy. He became the exile to bring us home. Let’s pray.

We are going to sing a song that just pours our heart out all around that, but I want to have a closing prayer just wrapped up in this. For some of us here this morning, you came in. I do not know where you are coming from, but I wonder if, as you think about your world and some of the ways you have been coping with our culture, if you are building nests in the wrong trees. Is that you? You are putting all your hope, your affections of heart, in your family. It is usually a good thing. In apocalyptic romance, in your work and career, in your athletic, whatever it is. You are building a nest in the tree, but I am telling you, listen. All the trees are coming down. They are coming down, and unless you build the nest of your heart on the rock named Jesus, you will not be home. Come home. Is there anything in your heart that you want more than Jesus this morning, anything that you trust more than Jesus? Right now, repent, repent, and say, “Jesus, above everything, I trust you.”

Maybe you came in this morning wanting to learn more about Christianity, more about how to follow Jesus, and I would say here it is. Here it is. He left home to come get you and bring you home, and you can begin experiencing that home now. All you need to say is, “Jesus, I trust you. I want to be home.” Tell Jesus what you need to tell Him right now, and now let’s stand. Let’s proclaim, in Christ alone is our hope.

46:28 minutes