Sermon – Chosen Exiles
Sunday February 13, 2022

Someone once said, Life is a storm. You're either coming out of one, in the middle of one or you're heading into one.

There are so many hard things going on right now. The waters are rising, the wind is blowing, there's no end in sight. How many of you are in a storm right now?

- Maybe it's your work. You work from home which is great, but you now work longer hours. You have bigger problems, a smaller team and more to do in less time.
- Maybe it's your relationships. You've been cooped up together so long there's tension and frustration. Maybe you're on your own and you're feeling lonely and isolated.
- Maybe it's a health crisis. You got the test results back and it's not good. The doctors are doing all they can but you don't know what to do.
- Maybe you're struggling with depression and anxiety. Maybe your child is struggling to cope.

Show of hands. How many of you are in a storm right now? You can raise your hand if that's you or click the button in the chat. **(COP Moment: I am in a storm)**

Life is hard. Because on top of the personal storms, there are many storms going on in the world.

- We're in a global pandemic.
- There's a supply chain problem.
- There are protests over vaccination mandates.

What do you do when you're in a storm? How do you cope? How do you make it through?

We're beginning a new series today called *When the Going Gets Tough.* Over the next several weeks, we're diving into the book of 1 Peter.

This book was written by the Apostle Peter to Christians who were in a storm.

- They were facing hostility from their Greek and Roman neighbours.
- They were ostracized and shunned.
- And on top of that, they were being persecuted by the Emperor Nero who had set fire to Rome and blamed the Christians for it.

These Christians were in the middle of a big storm. That's why the word *suffering* appears fourteen times in Peter's letter.

But in the midst of their suffering, Peter wants them to know something. That they have hope and that hope is found in Jesus. So he mentions suffering fourteen times, but he talks about this hope twenty six times!

Peter states his purpose for writing his letter:

I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. (1 Peter 5:12)

Many of us are in the middle of a storm. Our goal for this series is that whether you're coming out of a storm, in a storm right now or heading into one, that you would be encouraged and stand fast. That God's grace will give you strength, purpose and courage in the midst of the storm.

Peter's letter begins:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ:

To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen [2] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

(1 Peter 1:1-2, CSB)

Peter begins his letter not by addressing these suffering Christians in terms of their race, their moral background or their social status. He addresses them according to their identity.

Because how many of you know that suffering often leads to identity amnesia.

When we face challenges, it's easy to forget who God is and who we are. And the moment we do that, we lose perspective. We turn inward. We lose hope.

The Christians Peter was writing to lived throughout five regions in Asia Minor which we know today as modern Turkey. This letter travelled in a circuit to encourage the Christians there.

But Peter does a strange thing. He uses two terms to describe their identity. Two terms you wouldn't expect him to use. He calls them *Chosen Exiles*.

Why is this so surprising?

Some of you know that the terms *Chosen* and *Exiles* are Old Testament descriptions. They refer to Abraham and Israel.

- Abraham was *chosen* to leave his country to become an *exile* in a place that wasn't his home.
- Israel was God's *chosen* people who wandered around the desert and later *exiled* from their home.

Why was it so odd for Peter to use these terms to describe these people? Here's why. Peter was writing to Gentile or non-Jewish believers. But he's using Jewish terms to describe them. Why does he do that?

Peter is saying that,

Now through Jesus, you belong to the family of Abraham.

- *You are an Exile. Just like Abraham, you'll be misunderstood and mistreated. You'll wander around looking for your true home.*
- *But remember, you are also Chosen. God chose you because he loves you. He chose you to bless you. Not just to keep the blessings for yourself, but to be a blessing to others.*

What I want to do today is unpack these two terms that describe your identity as well. Because knowing who you are will give you the resources to face your storm with hope.

So let's get started!

The first thing about you is that, **You are an Exile**.

So what's an exile?

The original Greek for this is the term *parapidemos*. It refers to a foreigner, a stranger, a pilgrim. Someone from another country who's passing by.

But why does Peter use this term? These Christians were born in the places where they live. Why does Peter call them exiles?

It's because Peter isn't describing a geographical exile, he's describing to a spiritual exile.

Because as followers of Jesus, we are all exiles. This theme runs throughout the New Testament.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Philippians 3:20)

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (John 17:16)

Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:16)

The truth is, you and I are exiles. We're temporary residents here on earth. We're just passing by.

So what does this mean? It means **We are not home**.

Turn to your neighbour and tell them, You are not home. If you're watching online, type into the chat, I am not home.

Now, how many of you go camping? Our family camps a few times a year. But the crazy part is, Joanne hates it. So why does she do it?

Well, back when we were dating, we would go for long walks and talk for hours. On one of those walks, I mentioned how much I love to camp. And because Joanne was so love-struck and infatuated by this amazing, sensitive, godly man of her dreams, she promised that if we ever had a family, she would be up to go camping together. That's what love does – it makes you say crazy things!

Now I give her a lot of credit. Because like I said, she hates camping. She hates everything about it.

She hates sleeping on the ground, she hates the mosquitoes, she hates the comfort stations. Why does she hate it all? Because it's not home.

You see, home is where everything's right. Where you can crawl into a warm comfortable bed. Where you can shower in a clean bathroom. Where you doesn't have to worry about mosquitoes. You don't get that when you're camping; you only get that when you're home.

But here's the thing. You are an exile. Which means, you're not home. Your life here on earth will be uncomfortable, it will be hard.

- Work will be stressful.
- People will hurt you.
- Your body will decay.
- You'll lose loved ones.

Why? Because we're not home. Ever since sin entered the world, the world's not as it should be. Instead of obeying God, serving others and taking care of our planet, we reject God, use people and exploit the planet. As a result of our sin, our world was damaged. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. And ever since, we've been exiles.

That's why the world just doesn't feel right. That's why your life isn't totally fulfilling. You and I are exiles. We're on our way home but we're pilgrims on a journey. And the truth is, you and I will never face suffering well, until we face the truth that we are not home.

Our culture is heavily shaped by the Enlightenment. In other words, we believe that we are good and that the human race is improving. That every generation should have a better life than the previous one. That's why the pandemic is so hard to accept. That's why we keep asking, When are we going back to "normal"?

We think the normal life is comfortable and pain-free. But Pastor Tim Keller reminds us that this isn't biblical thinking. He says,

"We want the storyline of our lives to go from strength to strength, from success to success and end happily ever after. But throughout the Bible, we see something completely different – a persistent narrative pattern of life through death and triumph through weakness that reveals how God works in history and in our lives." (Tim Keller)

Do you realize that a lot of your suffering isn't from the suffering itself? It's from the fact that you're surprised you even have to suffer!

That's why Peter reminds us,

do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)

Kyle Harper is a historian who's studied pandemics throughout history. In his research, he noticed that during pandemics, followers of Jesus seemed to thrive. Why is that? It's because they realized that,

"This life was always meant to be transitory and just part of a larger story. What was important to these Christians was to orient one's life towards the larger story, the cosmic story, the story of eternity. They did live in this world, experience pain and lost loved ones. But the Christians of that time were called to see the story of this life as just one of the stories in which they lived." (Kyle Harper)

You see, our story isn't based on the belief that life is pain-free. Our story is based on the belief that God is guiding history, through pain and suffering to accomplish his purposes.

Our hope isn't in an afterlife where we go to heaven after we die. Our hope is in Jesus who will one day return to make all things new. He will bring an end to suffering and death, he will establish justice and

peace, he will give us resurrected bodies and we'll rule together with him in the new heavens and the new earth.

But we're not home yet. You are an exile. So don't be surprised when you have to suffer. But if you accept it, if you hold on to God's hope, if you see your life through God's story, then like the early Christians your faith can thrive even during a storm.

The second thing about you is, **You are chosen**.

How many of you remember being on the playground when kids would choose teams. Maybe you were the kid standing there hoping someone would choose you next to last instead of last. But you were chosen last and you still remember the pain.

But on the flip side, it feels great when you are chosen. I remember when I had the DTR, the Define the relationship talk with Jo. We had gone out on several dates and I knew that I wanted to be with her. So I told her how I felt and I asked if she wanted to take our relationship to the next level.

She responded with an enthusiastic yes! I was over the moon. For months, my friends would tell me how giddy I was, how I always had a goofy smile, how I was floating on cloud nine.

Because it feels good to be chosen!

- When you're chosen by someone you like.
- When you're chosen by the school you want.
- When you're chosen to work at a great company.
- When you're chosen for a promotion or an award.

It feels good to be chosen.

Now get this - the Apostle Peter says that you are chosen by God. And God didn't choose you because of your good works or because of your moral behaviour or because you read your Bible every day.

Before his death, Moses gives the Israelites these words.

The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the LORD loved you…

(Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

Why does God love you? It's not because of your education, how much money you make or what you've accomplished. God love you simply because he loves you.

This summer, Jo and I will be celebrating 17 years of marriage. One thing I've learned during this time is when your spouse asks you, Why do you love me? there's actually a right answer and a wrong answer.

The wrong answer is to give them reasons. I love you because you're beautiful. I love you because of the way you cook. I love you because of how well you provide for us. Just a friendly warning to all of you - don't do that! You'll get yourself in trouble.

Because what happens when their beauty fades, or when they can't do the things they can do now? What happens to your love for them then?

See, here's the right way to answer that question. You say, Honey, there are so many things about you that I love, so many things you do that I love. But I love you simply because I love you.

You see, that's unconditional love. And do you realize that's how God loves you?

In the Bible, God says

I have loved you with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3)

In fact, God chose you even before he created the world. This means that he knew all the ways you would sin and he chose to love you anyway.

- He loves you even when you lose it on your kids.
- He loves you even when you're struggling.
- He loves you even when you're unemployed.
- He loves you even when you're bedridden.
- He loves you even when you struggle with addictions.

Do you realize what that means? It means that **Nothing you do can make God love you any more and nothing you do can make God love you any less**.

Why does God love you?

He loves you simply because he loves you. Have you grasped that yet? Has it sunk in for you? You are Chosen. You are a beloved child of God. Until you know that, you'll strive and perform but you'll always feel empty.

But when you know that God loves you the same on your bad days as he does on your good, you'll find strength to face any storm.

You are Chosen and God loves you because he loves you.

Peter concludes his letter in a strange way. He says,

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings (1 Peter 5:13)

Peter is writing from Rome. So why does he say he's in Babylon? Babylon is a term that's often used to describes an empire that's opposed to God.

But Peter has another reason for doing this. Because there was a dark chapter in Israel's history. It happened in 596 BC when the people of God were exiled. Any guesses where they were exiled to? Babylon.

This was a hard time for them.

- The people lost everything.
- They faced enormous pressure to abandon their faith.
- They wondered if things would ever return to “normal.”

It had become clear– they weren’t home anymore.

But in a strange way, this exile was a gift. Because during this time, God was doing a work in their hearts.

- Exile is where God strips away our false hopes and idols.
- Exile is where our souls are purified and our faith refined.
- Exile is where all we have is God but we realize that he is enough.

What’s amazing about the Babylonian captivity is that the people’s faith didn’t get crushed during the exile, it actually flourished. They learned to sing the Lord’s song even in the midst of a storm.

- Although they couldn’t worship in the temple anymore, they gathered in local communities for worship, study and prayer.
- They learned to live out their faith as a minority people. Instead of imposing their beliefs on others, they learned to serve and bless their neighbours (seeking the peace and prosperity of the city).
- They also recognized their spiritual bankruptcy and inability to keep God’s covenant. If they were going to make it, they knew they needed a new covenant, a new saving act of God, a Deliverer to save them from their sin.

Many years later, God would send this deliverer, his own beloved son. This Son would leave home to come to earth. He would become a homeless wanderer. He would be misunderstood, mistreated and tortured. He would experience the ultimate exile.

Jesus, the Son of God, the only person who ever lived a sinless life, took the exile you and I deserved so that we, who have wandered away from God, can come home again into the Father’s arms.

How do you find the strength to endure suffering? How do you sing the Lord’s song even in a storm?

You look to Jesus. You remember the cross.

Because when you realize what Jesus has done for you, when you realize you’re part of a bigger story, when you realize that one day Jesus will return to set things right, you will find the strength not only to face the storm but to shine as a light in a dark place and to be a blessing to those around you.

Communion