Living as Exiles
1 Peter 2:11-25

How are you supposed to live as a Christian? At school or uni or army or work? Because on the one hand you know it means being different but on the other you don't want to stand out for the wrong reasons and you feel this tug of war going on inside. Or maybe you just feel clueless – what does it mean to be a Christian student, or financial controller or medic or whatever. How would that look different from anyone else?

Read: 1 Peter 2:11-25; 3:8-9

V11: What does it mean to be a sojourner? And what's an exile?

Sojourner: someone away from home, staying somewhere temporarily, foreigner, stranger.

And an Exile is longing for home, in enforced exile abroad.

Now, sojourners and exiles know they don't belong where they are. And an exile cannot yet go back where he does belongs.

So there's a tension. He has to stay where he is, but he knows he's only a visitor, he knows he doesn't really belong. And yet, crucially, he bears no ill-will to the people around him. You see, neither a sojourner or an exile is a spy behind enemy lines. The people he lives among are not his enemies. Now, they may see him like that, they may view him with some suspicion, but he is not to see them like that. In fact, there is a sense in which the exile is grateful for his adopted home country, he doesn't like it all, but he sees good where's there's good to be seen and he appreciates it and shouldn't be antagonistic towards it.

And Peter says we are sojourners and exiles in this world. We are like those around us, but we are also different. Just like I will never fool anyone I'm Swiss with an accent like mine, so there is a sense in which the Christian will never feel at home in the world, because this isn't home. So this tension you feel – like but different is normal.

But that doesn't answer the question of how we should live.

So how does Peter say we should live? Well, he talks about life on two fronts – internal and external

The Battle for the Interior

V11.

So if we're going to be serious about this life of being the same but different we're not going to give ground to what Peter calls 'the passions of the flesh.' And 'passion' is a good word for the battle we face on the inside: emotion, heat, energy. The passions of the flesh are not like being hit round the face with a wet fish, are they? The struggle against temptation and sin is passionate. There is this sense in which part of us, our flesh, wants to be like those around us. It wants to

give itself to what the world does, it wants to buy into the story the advertisers spin us. It wants to put 'me' at the centre. And it wants these things passionately.

We all face this battle for the interior.

But ultimately, Peter says, these passions war against your soul. And the way they do that is by trying to pin you too much to this life, to get you to think that the stuff of this world is what you need for real satisfaction. Like an eagle whose wings have been clipped, you've been made to soar in the things of God, but these passions clip your wings, and keep you earthbound.

You see, if you buy into the way of the world, these passions of the flesh tell you that you will only be truly satisfied, you'll only be truly complete if you have what it's offering: money, appearance, sexual relationships, porn, career, success. They're shouting, or whispering in your ear: you'll only be truly happy if you have this: if you look pretty, if you're having sex, if you're successful, if you make it financially. This is where you need to put your hope, this is where you can find real worth, or value, or thrill, or that sense of being alive. And it's stuff that may not be bad, in fact it may be good, but it's not the ultimate, because ultimately this stuff is just passing away.

But the gospel teaches us that we get our sense of worth and satisfaction and joy and completeness from knowing that we are accepted and loved and chosen by the only one whose opinion really matters and that this does not depend on us being beautiful, or successful but on Christ.

But here's the thing. This is where it comes down to how we should live, what it means to be the same but different. Peter says, You have to fight this battle for the interior in a way that does not bring disgrace on the name of Christ:

v12

People around us are like tracker dogs. Tracker dogs pick up a scent from miles away. Well, people spot hypocrisy from miles away and rightly so. And so we cannot claim to be different with our words but our lives be anything but. Instead, there has got to be something undeniably attractive about our lives.

The Example of the Exterior

Being a Christian is not simply an internal thing: we feel good, we feel ok, with church services designed to bless me and make me feel good about myself. Rather, as the gospel does its transforming work inside us, as we find our ultimate satisfaction in Christ, as He is the one we treasure, as we know and experience his grace and his love in our lives, this power at work inside has to manifest externally.

You see, if money or success or appearance is where you get your sense of worth from, if these are your ultimate, if you yield to these passions of the flesh, it will determine how you treat others, how you use your resources, how you spend

your time. And you will find yourself using people and stuff for your own gain, to boost your ego and to get what you want.

And that, tragically, is how so many people live.

Now, whilst they may be blind to that in their own lives – as all of us are to so many of our own faults – they won't be if they see it in your life. If you are different only in what you say, but not in who you are and how you live they will spot that a mile away. You have got to fight this internal battle in a way that leaves those on the outside not criticizing you for hypocrisy – if you sleep around like they do, if you trample on others like they do, if your spending habits are just the same as theirs, they won't miss that.

But if you abstain from the passions of the flesh and rather get your sense of value and worth from what Christ thinks of you and has done for you, then it will liberate you to serve others, and to use your resources for the good of others, in what the Bible calls 'good deeds', acts of justice and mercy. There's got to be a quality of life in good deeds, in justice and mercy that connects what you say to how you live.

And as those around you see how the gospel does its work in your life they take notice. You're the same as them, but different, in a good way.

But what this isn't is a kind of superior, I am better than you mentality. You see, this isn't about us looking good, as if we live in such a way to draw attention to ourselves, because that's good old-fashioned religion, isn't it? Religion is: I do good works to get approval from God and from others. But the Gospel is – God accepts me and approves me, not because of what I do but because of what Jesus has done, and as that sinks in, I will want to show the same kind of grace and love to others in good works that God has shown to me.

And then, as Peter says in v12, God gets the glory.

You see, the gospel does make us bold –in what we say and how we live, but it also makes us humble. It makes us bold because we don't depend on what others think of us, we know that God loves us, so we aren't afraid to stand out and speak the hard words to our culture or our friends, or fight for justice, even if it costs us. But the gospel also profoundly humbles us, because we realize that we are no better than others: v25 – we were straying sheep, for whom the shepherd had to die. The only reason we are different is because of what Jesus has done and his grace, and we want them to know and experience that as well. So the gospel makes us bold, but it also makes us humble – the humble mind of 3:8.

So this isn't about us looking good, it's about God and his grace and the gospel looking good.

And Peter highlights two areas where the Gospel has the power to make us different in a way that will stand out for good: Politics and how you respond when you are unjustly treated.

Politics
Danger is we treat those outside – especially those we disagree with - as enemies, in the same way we view the passions of our flesh. But whilst Peter tells us to abstain from, to resist, to fight against the passions of our flesh, he tell us to honour our political leaders – and given the situation these first century Christians were in, that includes those we profoundly disagree with.

V13-14:
Be subject 'for the Lord's sake'. What does that mean? Why for the Lord's sake? Because those looking on will glorify God by the way you do politics, by the way we engage with society and our communities for the common good.

You see, when it comes to politics, both left and right tend to disparage the other. If you think that ultimately politics and government and law making is the answer then you will tend to think that your side has the answer – because if you didn't you wouldn't be on that side, and whether you're on the right or the left you tend to speak against and despise the other.

But when you understand the gospel you know that neither left nor right have the answer. When you understand the gospel you realize that humanity is profoundly fallen, and the latest politician is not the messiah, Christ is. And the Gospel makes us bold in word and deed in confronting wrong doing, and acting for the common good, but it also makes us humble both about the answers politics can offer, but also humble in acknowledging our own failings and our need to learn from others.

And so, when the gospel takes root in our hearts it will influence the way we do and speak of politics and of political opponents. In my view, the sheer nastiness and polarization of modern politics is crying out for bold but humble Christian witness. And that is one very clear way the gospel will make us different from those around us.

You see, Peter says in 2:15 that by doing good – working for the common good, getting our hands dirty, working for justice and righteousness out of a spirit of humility, rather than lobbing political missiles, we will silence opponents.

Just look at what he says in v16 – because it's fascinating. In this whole context of politics and wider society and our relationship with the state, he says, 'live as people who are free.'

I think there are two traps Christians can fall into in not living as free: The trap of living as prisoners of war, and the trap of living as a slave.

For a prisoner of war, those on the outside are enemies. There's a war going on – but you can't take part because you're not free to, instead, having been captured by the enemy, you are herded together and forced to stick with your little clique, with those who are like you, members of your own side, locked away and sidelined from the war that's going on outside.

And sadly, as Christians we can live like that. We can exist in a kind of Christian ghetto, a Christian prisoner of war camp: lives being lost all around us, but we live in our own little world, wearing the uniform, waiting for deliverance, but totally sidelined.

But the second trap you can fall into is to live as a slave. Because a slave has little or no power, can't change anything, so becomes demotivated, with no initiative.

But Peter tells us that the gospel frees us to live as a free person, The only person you are enslaved to is God (v16). And a free person takes a full and active roll in the society and the community around them.

In 2:9 Peter says our role is to 'proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.' And that proclamation is going to be in word, but also in deed. Good works, acts of mercy and justice silence opponents Peter says in v15. I read something recently that said that we should be the kind of church where the local authorities say 'if they were to move away or go out of business, we'd have to put up taxes. We'd have to employ people to do what they do for the good of our community.' And that's what Peter is talking about here.

So, because of the Gospel, what Christ has done for us, the way we engage with society and do politics, and speak of those with whom we may profoundly disagree, is going to be of such a quality that no one can level the charge of hypocrite. That's what it means to be same, but different.

Unjust treatment
The example Peter gives is of servants and masters. Gospel is going to influence this relationship, especially unjust treatment.

Now, what's that got to do with me? Not a slave! But at work, at school, with your grades, you may experience what you perceive as unjust treatment at the hands of those in authority over you. And that is a golden opportunity to display this sojourner, exile, same but different spirit of the Gospel. Where you get your worth, your significance, your value from, what really matters often shows itself at moments such as these.

Because when we are treated unjustly there is always the desire - intense at times - for retaliation. But Peter says the gospel radically affects how you respond to unjust treatment. V20-1: 'If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you.'

So what will this look like? It's how you do or don't speak about that rubbish teacher, or when you get a bad grade which you think is wrong; when you are overlooked, or sidelined. Does it rock you? Is the rug taken out from under your sense of inner peace and poise? Do you join in with the chorus of complaints, or stay out of it?

Now, this does not mean you don't fight injustice, or challenge things: Peter makes it clear there is a right discrimination here, between good and just and bad and unjust masters. So it isn't saying there is no difference, anything goes, don't protest anything. Again, the gospel makes us bold to confront injustice and poor standards. But it also makes us humble in how we do it. And that will be in radical contrast to the way of the world which insists on 'me' and 'my rights' first.

But the gospel doesn't just influence how you do it, but when you do it. You see people will often fight injustice when it's unjust to them, they will complain when it's them being hard done by. But in Christ the Gospel calls us to a wider view, to act on behalf of others, to speak up for the widow and orphan, for the oppressed, to work for justice when there's no direct gain for us, and to do so with boldness and humility.

Now of course the question is how can we live like that – abstaining from the passions of the flesh, loving our political opponents, enduring unjust treatment, giving ourselves for the good of others. And the answer Peter gives is Christ: he committed no sin, he loved those who hated him, he endured unjust treatment. V23: he was reviled and did not revile in return.

And it is through having the truth of what he has done for us, v24 – he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree – and allowing the full measure of his grace and love for us sink in and transform our thinking, that he should love us when we were still his enemies, that we can 'die to sin and live to righteousness.'