

Please open your Bibles to 1 Peter 1 (and leave it open)

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in a sermon series called “Outsiders”

There are only a handful of times in my life when I felt like a real outsider  
MS was certainly one—but I think everyone felt like that in their own way  
And when I lived in Honduras, walking around as the jolly white giant

The truth is, the majority of our church does not truly understand

What it feels like to be an outsider

Asbury is a predominantly white, middle/upper income church

And historically, white Xians have sat squarely in majority position in USA

But these cultural realities are shifting in a few ways:

First, we are becoming (and have become) increasingly multicultural

Last year, the Union Superintendent, Kirt Hartzler

Shared that there were 89 unique languages being spoken

In the homes of Union high-schoolers (folks who live right around Asbury)

And this ethnic diversity is a wonderful thing

When we read about what heaven looks like in book of Revelation

It’s not a bunch of white people up there

We see people from every nation/ethnicity/language in worship

Man, I’d love for our church to reflect the diversity of heaven!

1<sup>st</sup> shift: Our country is increasingly multicultural & ethnically diverse

The second shift we’re seeing

Is that even though the % of Xians has not changed in significant ways

The social attitudes *toward* Christians certainly has

The climate has grown increasingly hostile toward people of faith

Some of this is our fault—we’ve behaved badly (judgmental/mean/too closely aligned w/a particular political agenda)

But some of this is just the offensive nature of the Gospel

To claim that “all have sinned” in an age where tolerance is the new gospel

Is the ultimate *faux pas*

Because such dogma undermines the tightly-held belief  
That you can believe whatever you want to believe  
Or do whatever you want to do  
As long as it doesn't actually affect anyone else (which is nonsense)

And so, it seems to be the case

The more faithfully we profess and practice our faith in the days to come  
The more we will *experience* what it means to be an outsider  
And that's why we need to explore this topic.

For the duration of this sermon series, we're studying the book of 1 Peter  
The author, Peter, was the impulsive, sometimes fumbling disciple of Jesus  
Who was the 1<sup>st</sup> to confess Jesus as the Messiah & son of God  
Who later denied any affiliation with him upon his arrest  
Who was as flabbergasted as anyone to learn of his resurrection  
Who was ultimately empowered by God's Spirit  
To play a central role in the birth of the church

And this same Peter wrote a letter (audience identified in v.1):

**“To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus,  
Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...”**

Peter identifies his audience as “exiles” or “strangers”

Now, on one level, this designation as “exiles” is metaphor—for outsiders  
But it's so much more than that

Peter's letter was most likely written during the reign of Emperor Nero

Who made it illegal for a person to be a Christian  
And he instituted systematic persecution of the church  
Nero would host these huge garden parties at night  
And would burn Christians to provide light  
Many Christians gave witness to their belief in JX by giving their lives as martyrs

And others—particularly within Rome—fled to new cities & countries to survive

Many in Peter's audience, then, were not only *figurative* exiles  
They were *literal* exiles, who had fled their homes b/c of persecution

And so, they escaped official persecution from Rome  
But most of these Christians entered cities  
That were very hostile toward Christians  
Because—more than anything—they didn't engage in idol worship  
Or participate in the social structures built around it

These people understood what it meant to be outsiders  
What it was like to be culturally offensive  
They'd escaped death in Rome, but lived in tense situations in new cities  
So Peter writes to build them up & call them to be courageously faithful

And one of the ways Peter does this is to put their suffering and persecution  
In historical and spiritual context  
This is some beautiful, potent language (pay attention to the words)

Peter writes in v.3 [**1 Peter 1:3-9**]:

*Praise be to the God and 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—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.*

Peter praises God for the gift of salvation  
That gives “new birth into a living hope” through Jesus' resurrection  
And along with this new birth comes a new inheritance

The billionaire Warren Buffett talks about having won the “ovarian jackpot”  
He didn't choose his family of origin or his upbringing  
But these things did so much to determine his success/station in life

Peter says that in Christ we have ALL hit the genetic jackpot  
We have become the beneficiaries of an even greater inheritance  
One that is being safeguarded in heaven and will be brought to us  
When Christ returns once and for all to unite heaven/earth  
And fully establish his rule over all creation

Peter reminds the church that b/c of their salvation in Christ

They have hope for the present AND the future

Which no amount of suffering or persecution can spoil or take away

He continues:

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Peter adds a narrative to their suffering

It is not senseless & it's not permanent—it's a tool to refine/prove their faith

Their endurance in suffering will mean greater praise & glory to God

On that day when Christ returns

Viewing suffering and seasons of difficulty as an opportunity for growth

Is a mark of Christian maturity

Another disciple, James, said a similar thing

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds...

“The testing of your faith produces perseverance... so you can be mature.”

The early church embraces difficulty of any kind as tool → maturity

And then Peter, who actually saw/touched/listened to Jesus remarks w/love:

*Though you have not seen him [Jesus] you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Peter is in awe of the beautiful thing God has done

By causing the good news about Jesus to spread

And take root in the hearts of people who never met him

Peter encourages the people in the present

By calling to mind their past, when Christ first called them

When they first trusted in X & experienced the new birth he's talking about

But then he reaches even further back into history

In v. 10-12, Peter says that this salvation they're experiencing  
Was something the prophets of Israel foresaw hundreds of years  
Before they were actually fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ  
The things they're experiencing are so precious  
That Peter says (in v.12) "even angels long to look into these things."  
In other words, heaven is envious of your experience of grace in Christ

Now, when we come to v.13, we see a transition marked by keyword, "Therefore"

Peter is about to give the church a call to action  
But we need to appreciate all the contexting Peter has just done

They've left their homes; they've escaped the sword (for now)

But have to manage social hostility on a daily basis  
Why all this backstory and theology?

Here's why [pause]:

Because stories color and inform our view of reality.  
Stories give meaning and purpose and strength

Hardly anyone would willingly sign up for a job that requires sleepless nights

Regular contact with all kinds of body fluids  
Almost constant inconvenience and, by the way, no pay.  
Yet, every one of us in this room either has a child or IS someone's child

The story, the idea of bringing a vulnerable being into life

And nurturing them into maturity  
Somehow gives us enough strength of mind  
To endure the inconveniences/discomfort that parenting brings w/it

Peter is putting the suffering of the church in the context

Of a greater story, one that's been in development for millennia  
Long before any of them came on the scene  
They're among the cast of characters of the greatest epic of all time  
A story that began with the mercy of God at creation  
Faced its great conflict in the rebellion of humanity

Reached its climax in the death/resurrection of the son of God

And will one day see its grand finale at his return to fully establish his reign

THEREFORE, says Peter, in light of all this [**1 Peter 1:13-16**]:

*“Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*”

Do you remember the scene in the movie *Braveheart*

Where William Wallace of Scotland

Who had been leading a rebellion against England

Was betrayed and captured, paraded out in front of the masses

And tortured until he would pledge loyalty to the crown of England

And in doing so, to un-do everything he had done to free Scotland?

Moments before he was led in front of the crowds to be tortured

The woman he loved offered him a drug to lessen the pain he’d experience

But he refused it, saying: “I need to have my wits about me...”

He knows that this moment calls for all of his concentration/focus

He’s finally dragged out before the people, his body torn to pieces

Then he’s allowed to address his interrogator and the crowd

And he yells out “FREEDOM” defiantly

And then every man in the viewing audience suddenly gets dust in their eye

This is what Peter’s instruction makes me think of:

*Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled*

*Set your hope fully on the grace that’s coming*

*Reject the old way of thinking that reflects ignorance about God*

*Accept that you are holy, different, other, called out*

*By a God that is holy, different, other*

A few weeks ago, we hosted David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons for *Good Faith Live*

These guys shared some of the data they uncovered

When they were writing their book *Good Faith*

They said that after conducting thousands of national interviews  
That Christians were given the precarious labels (by many in our country)  
As irrelevant and extreme  
Irrelevant- meaning the way we lived, the things we valued were out of sync  
Extreme- not only were we out of touch, but our ideas are even dangerous

And then, David and Gabe said something surprising:  
That rather than rejecting these labels  
We should give ourselves permission to embrace them

You know what, if being “relevant” means trying to align w/the values of our day  
Is it the worst thing in the world to be irrelevant?  
Because what’s “relevant” doesn’t seem to be working all that well  
What’s relevant doesn’t seem to be making the world any more peaceful

And it may be the case that it’s not that we’re TOO extreme  
It’s that we’re not nearly extreme enough  
In our efforts to stay “relevant” and approachable and likable  
We’ve underappreciated our calling to be complete standouts  
People who are extreme in our pursuit of an alternate way of living  
A way of living that demonstrates that our lives are being narrated  
By God’s big story—a story of God restoring the brokenness of our world  
However and wherever it shows up

The way we live reflects a story—what story does your life reflect?  
Is it a story of self-advancement? Of achievement? Of wealth-accumulation?  
Is it a story of victimhood? Of addiction to impulses?

As people who, together, are following Jesus & helping others follow Jesus  
We want our lives to reflect the story of God  
Putting the world back together

So how do we start? How do we stay engaged in the efforts for our lives to reflect  
God’s story? To be holy.

[3 practices]

## **Reflect on the Word**

There's an admonition throughout Scripture

To meditate/memorize/consider/learn to love words of God in Scripture

Joshua 1:8, Psalm 119, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12

Jesus said, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word..."

We are supposed to treat the Scriptures like a daily meal we can't live w/o

When we reflect on the Word we are unlearning reality as we've known it

And reprogramming our minds to live into reality as God would have it

So we must reflect on the Word.

## **Reflect on the world**

To reflect on the world is to evaluate the stories that guide people's actions

It's to ask questions about people's hopes, their motivations

Their underlying assumptions about reality

We do this firstly by asking questions of ourselves:

Why do I do the things I do?

Did I post that pic to social b/c I'm trying to find validation?

Is my drive for success at work/school trying to cover up an insecurity?

We ask questions of the things we do, the things we love/hate

We become detectives/investigators of ourselves & the world

We look for signs of brokenness, of depravity, of insecurity

We hold our world up to the light of the Word

And that leads us to our third call to action:

## **Reflect on the work**

When we reflect on the WORD

And learn to train our hearts and minds to love what God loves

(Justice/truth/love/humility/community)

And when we reflect on the World

And learn to discern the brokenness in our hearts & in the world at large

We notice GAPS—places where the Word and the World don't align

These gaps shows us our opportunities

To live in such a way that reflects God's story

These gaps signify our call to get to work

Where are there gaps between God's Word and God's World?

*Gaps of justice* (human trafficking, poverty, war, picture of Omran – 15k kids)

*Gaps of love* (orphan/foster/elder care)

*Gaps of order* (dealing w/broken systems and institutions)

*Gaps of good news* (people who've never heard good news about "new birth into living hope through resurrection of Jesus from the dead...")

For every gap between the Word and the World, there are opportunities

For the people of God, the ones who follow Jesus

To lovingly and creatively work toward redemption and restoration

And in doing so to announce to the world the good news

That there is a God who will one day fully redeem/restore all things

You don't have to be a titan like Mother Teresa or Billy Graham

To play a part in God's story of restoration

No, we're simply called to practice together a kind of ordinary faithfulness

Paying attention to the gaps between the Word and our world

And asking God what we can do to get to work.

Let's pray.