

RESILIENT HOPE // Empires & Eternity

Today, we're jumping into a study, through the book of 1 Peter, called Resilient Hope. Why 1 Peter and why now?

This moment we're living in feels a bit like the world around us is spiraling out of control, and it's doing so at a rate that at times feels unnavigable.

Unfolding conflict surrounding Israel in the middle east, tropical storms devastating the Southeast region of our country, as well as an unbelievably polarizing election cycle where people are far less likely to debate actual policy and instead spend their time, energy, and attention vilifying and smearing anyone with an opposing point of view.

So, the question for the follower of Jesus today is this: How do we navigate the days in which we're living? What does it mean to be faithful citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven while living in the empires of men?

Because what we find not only in the biblical storyline, but played out in human history, is this simple fact: Empires come and go, but the kingdom of God endures forever.

Peter, in this letter, is writing to scared and scattered Christians. In his opening greeting he says,

1 Peter 1:1, "...To those who are elect exiles of the **Dispersion** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."

Peter is writing to believers who had scattered from Rome across the first century world because of the horrific persecution they were facing at the hands of Nero. Christians were being tortured and killed for sport. They were sentenced to public executions for the amusement of Roman citizens as they were fed to lions in arenas across the Roman empire, or they were dipped in oil, impaled, and lit on fire to provide light at evening festivals.

Peter is writing to people whose family members, neighbors, friends, and loved ones had been martyred in the most horrific ways imaginable. So, these people who were suffering tremendous grief, they scattered, they dispersed throughout the first century world. That's the "dispersion" Peter is referring to.

But notice what he calls them in the very first sentence.

1 Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those who are elect exiles..."

- Elect - Chosen by God. They belong to Him. No amount of pain, grief, hardship, or suffering can change that fact.
- Exiles - This speaks to their relationship with the world around them. These people had been exiled from their country, but Peter is referring to all Christians everywhere, including us.

The truth is, if you belong to Jesus, you are an elect exile. The Christ follower ultimately has been chosen by God and temporarily separated from their true country, our true home as citizens of heaven. As Christians, we're strangers, foreigners living in a foreign land.

Now what does that mean for us in the moment we're living in? As a foreigner, there's a few options for how we engage with the culture around us.

- 1. Settler** - This is someone who seeks to make this new country their permanent home. So, they leverage all of their creativity, resources, time, and energy to make this life as absolutely comfortable as they're able. It's incredibly easy for this person to turn pressing social, cultural, or political issues into idols that become the central focus of their life...
- 2. Visitor** - This is exact opposite of a settler. They're just visiting, just passing through. They don't have any real connection to the place or care for the people. They remain emotionally disconnected from social or political issues going on in that society, because they're only staying for a little while, and so, they remain completely disengaged from the culture.
- 3. Exile** - An exile is someone whose true citizenship is somewhere else, but for an undefined amount of time, they must make their home in a new place. So, they invest in this new community, form relationships, learn the culture, but they don't worship it, they don't center their life on it, their hopes in life don't rise and fall based on it. Because all the while, they know there's a day when they'll get to go to their true home.

Peter is trying to help them and us change our mentality toward the world around us. Another way to think about this is walking down the narrow road... ditches on either side. The two temptations Christians face with the culture around us that we either...

DISENGAGE ENTIRELY - **ENGAGE FAITHFULLY** - CULTURAL IDOLATRY

This world is not our home. As followers of Jesus, you belong to a different kingdom with a completely different set of values. You follow a different authority. And at the same time, as citizens of Heaven, you are called to be salt and light while living in the empires of men.

Jeremiah 29:7, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

On one hand, don't make an idol of the culture around you. And on the other, don't disengage entirely either. Don't isolate out of exasperation or frustration with the culture. But instead, as elect exiles, **engage faithfully** with the world around you. Seek the welfare of the land you're living in, even though this isn't your home, the moment you and I are living in involves people that God loves—that God cares about! Care about the culture, invest in the community, and steward the influence that God has given you well because we know that the way of God leads to human flourishing.

How do we do that and what does that look like during our current election season?

An idea has arisen in our country that pastors and preachers like me should stay away from political issues and stick to moral and theological issues in the bible. What's interesting is over the last 50 years, the church hasn't moved to become more political, but politics have moved toward issues of morality and theology.

So, as a church that's committed to preaching the whole counsel of the word of God, I'm going to do that regarding five key areas that our country will be voting on in the coming days that are primarily moral and theological and have political implications.

And I'll probably upset just about every one of you this morning, but I have an obligation to point us to what God says, regardless of the consequences. Because as we've said in the previous weeks, the culture doesn't shape the gospel, the gospel shapes the culture. And if the gospel shapes the culture, we have to know what it says.

What God says about...

1. Immigration & Borders

As Christians, God has an enormous amount to say about the stranger, the immigrant, the foreigner.

Leviticus 19:34, "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Zechariah 7:9-10, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor..."

Deuteronomy 27:19, "'Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.'"

Acts 17:26, "And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place..."

In the Old Testament, God led Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that would protect the city from her enemies. God is for the foreigner, and He is for borders. We should welcome legal immigrants into this country. Not every illegal immigrant is an evil person seeking to do harm to the citizens of the U.S.. But there are some that do intend harm. So, as citizens of Heaven living in the empires of men, we need to elect governmental leaders that will uphold the law according to Romans 13.

2. Religious Liberty & Civil Disobedience

All throughout the book of Acts, the apostles were being commanded by those in authority to stop talking about Jesus...over and over again, you know what they said?

Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men."

Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego (under King Nebudchadnezzar in Dan 3) refuse to bow and worship the golden idol, even under the threat of death, and obeyed God rather than man.

When government leaders command us to do something God forbids, or forbid us from doing something God commands, our responsibility as citizens of the Kingdom

of Heaven is to humbly, and respectfully, resist and disobey those commands. We're living in a day where this is becoming more and more prevalent and the Church, while remaining kind, loving and humble, must grow a backbone and resist any overreach of government that violates our religious conscience and integrity no matter what the consequences are, and when it comes to that, as we move forward as a church in humility and respect, we will gladly go first. The way we do that matters.

Because our job is to obey God rather than man.

3. Biological Sex

Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

If you, or someone you know and love has undergone surgery in an effort to change their gender, I want you to hear me. God did not make a mistake when He created you. When He formed you in your mother's womb, you were made fearfully and wonderfully, and God delights in the way He created you. He loves you deeply and so does this church.

And what's amazing to me is the language around this ideology in our culture: "Gender affirming care." In reality, it's none of those things. It's not gender affirming. If it were gender affirming, we would be affirming God original design.

And it's not caring because the sheer number of people who go through sex-change, hormone therapy, and get to the end of that process or years down the road realize that they've made a horrific mistake that they're going to have to live with for the rest of their life. It's neither affirming nor caring. It's supporting an ideology that causes horrific trauma and exacerbates mental illness in the already confused and vulnerable among us that need the beautiful, healing, redemptive work of the gospel in their life.

4. Life

Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you..."

Psalms 139:13, "For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb."

Before the womb, God knew you and had plans for your life. He forms us with purpose while we're in our mother's womb! If you are one of the 1 in 4 in our country who has undergone an abortion, I want you to know there is forgiveness and healing available to you in the person of Jesus who loves you and has mercy for you. In fact, we offer a healing from abortion class here in the church because Jesus loves you and so do we. But I'm not going to shy away from the truth. From the perspective of the Author of Life, to end the life of the most innocent and vulnerable among us is without question, murder.

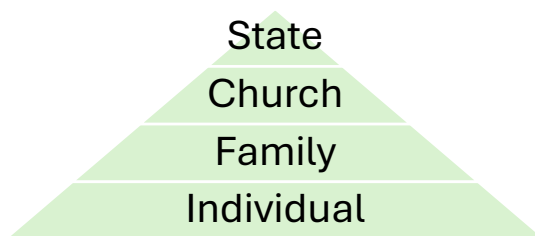
Proverbs 6:17, "...the LORD hates... hands that shed innocent blood..."

Any policy, party, politician, or person that supports the shedding of innocent blood will be held to account by God. Any culture that encourages and even celebrates the ending of any innocent life... for example ...by bringing mobile abortion clinics to their national convention like food trucks and celebrating and incentivizing free abortions for whoever wants one... is a culture that God hates.

Proverbs 8:36 "...all who hate Me love death."

5. Family

Within His created order, God has established four specific institutions.



Each one builds upon the other, and when any government seeks to erode God's design for the individual, the family, or to neuter the prophetic voice of the Church, that government is destroying the very God-given institutions it is established by and built upon and will inevitably create and cause their own destruction.

This has been repeated throughout human history, and we're seeing the deliberate attempt to undermine God's desire for all of these institutions in western culture.

As Christians, as salt and light, how do we stave off the advancement of what God calls evil in our culture for as long as possible? What is the best available path forward in the political moment we find ourselves in? While I won't tell you who to vote for, I will tell what God says, not based on personalities, but solely based on platforms and policies.

God, through Peter, says, *"Embrace your identity as exiles, and until you're able to return to your true home, as my chosen people, engage faithfully in the world around you. Seek the welfare of the culture you find yourselves in."*

1 Peter 1:2-3, " ...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."

The Father, through the person of Jesus, brought salvation to the world. What does salvation offer us? A living hope. An unshakeable, immovable, indestructible hope. That because of the resurrection of Jesus, anything and everything permanent that could crush us, or destroy us, was completely and eternally defeated!

Where is your hope for the future? Are your hopes more rooted in a particular candidate? And don't get me wrong, it matters. There are practical implications for people's lives that deeply matter to God and should matter to us. But where is your ultimate hope? What is your heart resting in? Where are you finding your confidence and security?

Victor Frankl was a Jewish-Austrian doctor who was imprisoned at Auschwitz in WW2 and survived. Later, he wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning* in which he told stories from his time there, and he described how various prisoners dealt with despair. Many responded to their hopeless situation by becoming brutal and cruel themselves--a kind of survival of the fittest. Others just gave up.

He wrote,

"Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate. We all feared this moment - not for ourselves, which would have been pointless, but for our friends. Usually, it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or go out on the parade

grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick-bay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up."

- Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Many, he said, held onto the hope that if they stayed alive, their health, family, professional achievements, fortune and position in society would be restored to them. That was their hope. But after liberation, they went home and many found those things that they had dreamed about—their homes, their jobs, their families, their communities—were irretrievably gone, or they'd changed, and many went into deep depression, and many of the survivors even committed suicide. Their hopes had been shattered.

Frankl said that the ones who truly overcame Auschwitz were those who had a fixed reference point beyond, not only their current circumstance, but beyond the world, something they held onto that was beyond the grasp of even death itself.

This is what Peter points us to. He's saying that all of you exiles, whose friends and loved ones you've lost to persecution, or famine, or some unimaginable end...don't let these things crush you because you've been given **a living hope** in the person of Jesus. And that hope builds into you a resilience, an unsinkable buoyancy about you.

Church, we're called to participate, to do our part to stave off the advancement of evil in the world, but no matter what happens here and now, no matter what happens in November, we've been given a hope that is far beyond any election or any circumstance. This gives us the power, the confidence, the ability to withstand, to endure, persevere through whatever trial or hardship we may face in this life. What is your hope resting in today?

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "So we do not lose heart....For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."