

Desiring Christ

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[0 : 0 0] So, think about this big idea of exiles on mission. Like I said, we spoke quite a bit last week about the exile idea. We're going to think a little bit more about the mission idea just now. And so, by way of introduction, I just want to introduce this idea of mission and our lives as mission. Mission's a word that Christians can use a lot. Sometimes it's a slightly debated term. For some of us, when we hear the word mission, we might first of all think of missionaries going off to far-flung corners of the globe to preach and proclaim the gospel. And that is certainly mission. But I will suggest that mission is perhaps something much bigger, something much wider.

Other folks, when you hear the idea of mission, might think more of Tom Cruise running in the latest mission impossible or any other spy for that matter on some kind of mission. And it conjures up, I guess, ideas of something exciting and dangerous, but perhaps also the idea that mission is something that only specific people can do with a specific set of skills and abilities.

But again, I want to suggest that this term mission is something much bigger and broader. What I want to suggest is that mission is a helpful term for Christians to think about all that God wants all of his people to do. This idea that Jesus has called all of us to be on mission. He has a purpose for you. He has a role for you. He's involving you in his plans to extend his kingdom. I find this both an exhilarating idea, but also a rather challenging idea. But I think it's intrinsic within Scripture. God has called us not to be static, but to be active. He has given us a job, if you like, a mission. And what we're going to see in these verses here in 1 Peter is that the basic mission that Jesus gives to all of his people is to live in a way that reflects what he has done for us. Mission might and almost certainly will involve more than that, but it's never going to be less than that. And so Peter's point in these verses is that the living hope and salvation that

Christians have in Christ must produce a particular way of life. And it's this way of life that is basic and integral to the mission of the Christian. Ultimately, the basic mission of the Christian is to desire Christ and to live for him. So let's work through what Peter says. I've got three points to work through. We're going to think about how hope must produce holiness, redemption must produce reverence, and the word of the Lord must produce love. And all of these kind of converge on this final point where we want to end is that all of this points towards us desiring Christ. So hope must produce holiness. Peter's first implication of this living hope, that phrase he used earlier in chapter one, that living hope we have in Christ is that our hope must produce holiness. And he suggests that this starts with a completely changed mindset. Because we have a living hope, we have been redeemed from our sins and our failings, and he has promised us a new life forever with him. But that should then change the way in which we see the world. It should shape our priorities. And so Peter begins, therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus

Christ is revealed at his coming. So Jesus, he's going to return one day. Peter's beginning with that fact. And our living hope is rooted in the reality that a new creation is coming when Christ does.

[4 : 07] But it's very hard to live with that constantly in mind, isn't it? Life is busy. Life's full of things that we stress and worry over. We're so often fighting fires all over the place, running from thing to thing, so often only able just to think about what's just coming around the corner.

Which is why Peter is saying this. So what we have there in our Bibles in front of us is, he says, therefore, with minds that are alert. But it's literally a girding up the loins of your minds, which is quite a visual image that he gives us there. The girding up the loins of your minds, he's saying, set your hope on the grace of Christ that he's bringing when he comes. The idea he wants to get across is we need to prepare our minds because we naturally struggle to live in light of what will happen when Jesus returns. Peter knows that that's not where our minds naturally rest. And so that's why he uses this image, maybe a more contemporary version of it would be tying your shoelaces tightly before our run or adjusting your tie before you go into a big boardroom meeting. He's telling us that we need to work hard at readying ourselves, preparing ourselves, getting our minds in gear.

He's got another image for it as well. It's one that Peter's particularly fond of. He uses it throughout this letter. It's the image of soberness. If you're drunk, you don't have control of your faculties. So Peter's kind of using this as a metaphor to say we need to be in control of our minds because our minds wander and they don't always wander in particularly helpful directions.

And that's probably not helped by the algorithms in the screens that we're glued to. Our minds are all over the place. So Peter's saying, as Christians, we have something amazing. We have this living hope, hope of eternal life. And so we mustn't abuse that by losing control of our minds.

Because when we're not alert and sober, as it were, we're going to find it much harder to be obedient. And we're also going to find it much easier to follow our own desires. And Peter continues, as obedient children, then do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

[6 : 31] The ideal child is probably the child that does what they're told. The more frustrating child is probably the one that doesn't. It doesn't follow mom and dad's advice, does whatever it wants, no matter how bad for them, no matter what the consequences might be. And Peter's saying, we are children. We are children of God. And so he wants us to be obedient children. Contrary to the dogma of the modern world, actually what we desire the most might not be the most helpful thing for us.

Actually, what will be good for us, Peter's saying, is obedience to our Father in heaven. Because God actually does know categorically what's going to be good for us. Our obedience to God is as important as the toddler's obedience to the parent who tells them, no, don't run into the busy road.

But so often we can be more like toddlers running headlong into catastrophe or running headlong into sin because we're not thinking. Our minds aren't in gear. And so it's why Peter's saying we need to have a clear head and a focus on Christ and that hope that we have. Because what is best for us, according to God, is holiness. But, says Peter, just as he who calls you is holy, so be holy in all you do. For it is written, be holy because I am holy. Holiness in this context is a way of life that reflects the goodness and perfection of God. The idea of holiness, it's this idea of being set apart.

And the holy God, like we just sang about, he is a holy God. He wants us to live in a way that reflects his holiness, his difference, his perfection. Peter's actually, he's quoting here from the book of Leviticus. So if you've been part of our community groups, this might be rather fresh because we've just got to Leviticus in our Bible read-through. And though the Old Testament law doesn't quite apply to Christians today in the same way as it did back in the time before Jesus, Peter actually helps us see how there are really helpful principles within the Old Testament law that continue all the way through and apply to us today. And holiness is one of them. Because God is holy, he wants his people to be holy, to be distinct. The context of these words, when Peter was writing in Leviticus, God's people, they'd been saved from slavery in Egypt and they were on their way to the promised land. And God's basically saying that I want you to be holy because I don't want you to be like the people that you formerly were living with, the people in Egypt. I don't want you to live like they live in Canaan either. I want you to have a distinct identity by following my laws.

Because I am the Lord. And Peter is drawing a parallel here. God's people today are surrounded by cultures and worldviews that go against God and how he wishes his people to live. God's people in every age then are to be holy because God is holy. His holiness is both a safeguard for the church because it is a better way to live, even if it might often feel like it. But it's also a way to demonstrate to the culture and to people around us as we live in exiles that God's way is good and that God is good.

[10 : 06] Our hope in Christ must produce holiness because this is the most powerful demonstration that our hope is real. Our hope has to produce changed lives, no longer driven by our desires but by obedience to our Father who knows what's best for us. Holiness, a distinctive obedience to the law of Christ, is at the heart of the mission that God gives us. So our second point, the second implication then builds on this.

So this is the idea that redemption must produce reverence. And so Peter says, since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. Once again, Peter's picking up on this idea of living as exiles or foreigners.

And he's saying that our life must be marked by fear. What he means is, is not a crippling terror of good, bribed or paid off. He's perfect in his judgments. And what Peter's trying to get across is that just because God has chosen you and called you to be his, doesn't mean that you can do what you like without consequence. That's what theologians sometimes call cheap grace. Cheap grace is the idea that we've been saved, God loves us, so actually I can really do what I want without worrying too much. And there's not really going to be consequences. That's cheap grace. Basically, it's an abuse of grace.

But that's not actually how grace works. It's not how God works. Grace changes us. We are forgiven if we are following Jesus. But Jesus is now also at work within us to change us and shape us to be the people he wants us to be, to reflect God's holiness. And so Peter is saying, because you call God your father and because he is the impartial judge, give him the respect that he is due. Because we've been saved, that doesn't give us license to be flippant with God. Rather, it should encourage us to be more reverent because we know what it is that we've been saved from. We know what God is judging. We also know that he is the father who has made that possible. And it's that redemption that God has made.

has given us, that redemption from judgment and sin. That's the second reason Peter gives as he encourages us to reverence. So he continues, for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. And so Peter's going to the Old Testament again to illustrate the redemption that Christians have experienced. So in the Old Testament, a sacrificial lamb was used. It would be offered on the altar of the tabernacle or the temple as a substitute often for the sins of the person who was offering the lamb. The lamb was the payment, its death was the price. And in the New Testament, Jesus is very often pictured as a sacrificial lamb. Interestingly, though, Peter's focus here is not so much on redemption from sins, though I think that's very much in the background, but on the redemption from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors. So his focus is on redemption from the world around us.

[13 : 46] And so in this respect, Jesus is particularly like the Passover lamb. And I think that's what Peter has in view here. The Passover lamb that marked the redemption of God's people from their slavery in Egypt. Jesus redeems us from our slavery to the world and the powers that dominated. We all, even if we've grown up as Christians, we all inherit a set of cultural assumptions and cultural baggage.

Peter calls this the empty way of life. It's quite a strong image. And Jesus reaches down and pulls us up from that. The cultural pressure to behave a certain way or say certain things or tow a certain line can often be hard, can often be frustrating. And the gospel frees us from that. And I think in our cultural moment where everything seems to be fluid, sex, gender, even truth itself, and when division and war and poverty seem to be on the rise, I think it's extremely comforting to have a hope in God because he's a solid rock from which we can build our life upon. He's a strong foundation. It's not fluid and moving, but it's something solid. He is our father who we can call upon, and he is working in this world. And in fact, his work in this world, his mission, if you like, is rooted even before the creation of the world. As Peter says, he, Jesus, was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him, you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

So the pressures and opinions of this present culture, which we ought to note are very particular to this time and place, well, they have nothing on the eternal and solid purposes of God. God doesn't change like the winds of Western society. And more than that, the redemption that Christians have is no accident in history. That's what Peter wants to get across. God has planned your redemption from before the creation of the world. And that's why Peter says you believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead, if that is indeed your hope. Peter's argument is that since we have this redemption, we ought to have a special reverence for God as our Father, Redeemer, and Judge. And I reckon in this world that has lost its bearings and its sense of foundations, that our attitude of reverence will be a powerful witness. If we believe that God is real and Jesus has redeemed us, if we speak in a way that conveys the solemn truth of this, that's going to be powerful.

When we worship together, if we have an attitude of reverence for God, that's going to convey something about who God is, because we treat him with a sense of awe, because we believe he deserves it.

Our redemption ought to produce reverence in our lives, because it's the right attitude to a holy God, but it's also a compelling attitude to a watching world. If we present our Christian life as an optional part of our life, rather than the beating heart of it, well, we shouldn't be surprised if we don't see anyone wanting to find out more. But, and this is our third point, our reverence and our holiness, they can't be divorced from that most essential aspect of the Christian life, and that is love.

[17 : 48] Love, it's a word that's used so often, it almost loses the force that it should have. But the love that we find in Scripture, the love that we learn about in Jesus, is radical, it's a sacrificial love, and it's rooted in God himself. God's love is a bounteous, full giving of himself. We see this most clearly in the death of Jesus. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for his friends. Jesus said those words, and at the same time, he commanded his disciples to love one another. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. God's love led to the cross. The love that characterizes the church must be of that quality, a love that would make us willing to die for people who would hate us. And so Peter says, now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart. Obedience to the truth, Peter's arguing, is rooted in a sincere love. The church of Christ has to be marked by that kind of love. If we're not, we're doing a real disservice to the gospel. And this love, rooted in Christ, ought to bridge all sorts of chasms.

So the Rangers fan and the Celtic fan, I know it must be particularly hard at this point, so I'm told, at any rate, ought to love each other in Christ. The staunch nationalists and the vehement unionists ought to love each other in Christ. Perhaps a more shocking example, but the Ukrainian and the Russian, or the Israeli and the Palestinian, in Christ, are able to love one another. And I don't mean tolerate, I mean love. In Christ, if someone is part of this church family, for example, or is to come into this church family, if culture dictates that there was some kind of barrier between us, the gospel dictates that that barrier should no longer exist. The gospel dictates a love that would give one's life for the other person, no matter who they are. And if we could extend that love beyond the boundaries of this church family, how much more powerful would that be?

Peter says that this is what it means to be born again of the imperishable and living Word of God. For you've been born again, Peter says, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God. For all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the Word that was preached to you. Peter's quoting there from Isaiah, one of the prophets in the Old Testament. And he's saying that people and culture, the world we live in, it might look glorious and powerful, monolithic almost. But Peter says their glory is like grass. Peter's readers were living in the shadow of the Roman Empire at its height. But he's saying that that power means nothing.

Rome fell after all. They didn't know that at the time. It didn't look like it would. But Peter's trying to show them that every world empire, every phase of humanity, every cultural hegemony will all fall like petals on a flower. The thing that won't fall, that won't become irrelevant, is the Word of the Lord. It endures forever. We're still reading it. We're still learning from it. And contrary to popular opinion, interest in it seems to not be waning, but actually on the increase. And this Word, if you're a Christian, has given you a rebirth, the gospel, when it is preached and taught, brings about new birth, the creation of new life in Christ. That's what Peter's readers have experienced. It's what many of us have experienced too. And this new birth gives us a new start where we can live as God intended us to live. We return, once again, to the imagery of childhood. We've been reborn to a new life in Christ.

And so now we have to unlearn the assumptions of the past, all that cultural baggage that we carry around with us, and learn what does it look like to belong to God. And what it looks like is love.

[22 : 32] Notice the sins that Peter highlights. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. These are sins that stand in opposition to love.

Malice and deceit, those are rooted in our selfishness. Hypocrisy and envy too, and slander. Words that hurt and cut, that's not coming from an attitude of love and care. That's coming from selfish desires. We all know it's pretty easy to hold grudges, to grumble about others. It's easy to hold things back from others, a matter of a sense of pride or frustration. It's easy to desire what other people have, and let the green-eyed monster of envy bubble up within us.

And these sins, they might not be obvious to other people, but we know them. We recognize whenever they start building up in our hearts. And when we let them have our way with us, it's going to have repercussions for the church and for our witness, for our mission, for how God calls us to be. If we're serious about the Bible, and we should be, we must let it shape us. We need to be hearers of the word and doers of the word. And so, as we finish, the heart of how we do this is ultimately found in the last two verses of this section. Like newborn babies, says Peter, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. Sometimes in the New Testament, the image of babies needing milk is used to accuse

Christians of a lack of maturity. That's not what Peter has in mind here. Rather, Peter is using the illustration of a baby craving milk to teach Christians how we ought to live for God and grow as his obedient children. Now, I'm very aware that for Asher and I, there's going to be some sleepless nights on the horizon once the baby comes, because babies, so I'm told, when they have a craving for milk, they'll let you know about it. So, what do we as Christians crave? What is our heart's desire?

We've spoken about how our hope should produce holiness, how our redemption should produce reverence, and how the word which Christ has given us should produce love. At the root of all these things must be an underlying craving for Christ himself. The phrase that's translated crave pure spiritual milk, the word for spiritual, it's not the word that usually gets translated as spiritual, it's more the sense of we need to crave the milk of the new life, if you will, or the milk of the new reality brought about by Christ and his word. In essence, we need to desire Jesus. Why? Because, says Peter, you have tasted that the Lord is good. He's quoting from Psalm 34, which we sang, and it's a psalm of David, the king in the Old Testament. It's a psalm that he wrote whenever he was living amongst his enemies. He was living amongst the Philistines, and he actually had to pretend to be mad in order to escape them. And so it's a psalm that's really about the life of exile. David composes it as God's king, but living away from God's people, God's king surrounded by God's enemies. It's a psalm of exile, and this is a book about exile, 1 Peter. And David says, despite being in this position of exile, being surrounded, he says, taste and see that the Lord is good. The Christian life of exile and mission is rooted in Christ's goodness. Taste and see that Jesus Christ is good. He died on a cross for you, taking the punishment for your sin and redeeming you from the empty ways of the past. He was resurrected from the dead, giving you a living hope, a hope for the future. And he is returning to make everything right once more. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Just as the baby has to keep coming back for more milk, just as their craving comes around time and time again, so must ours. We know, if we if we believed in Jesus, we know how good he is. We know how loving he is. We know what he has done for us, and we know the incredible implications of that, the future hope we have. And so, why wouldn't we? Why wouldn't we want to just keep coming back time and time and time again to him? Taste and see that Jesus Christ is good that Jesus Christ is good and keep tasting, keep craving him, keep desiring him.

[27 : 55] When we desire Jesus, we will live for him, and when we live for him, we will desire him. Our mission is never less than this, desiring Christ, craving Christ, tasting and seeing time and again that Jesus Christ is good.

Amen.