

Exiles of Hope

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We're in a unique time. Global unrest seems to increase every week. It's a cultural moment too. Old beliefs and morals are marginalized; new ones take their place. Personal sin and temptation confront us all, *if we're not careful, those sins will become the true terror of our lives*. Global unrest, cultural turbulence, personal sin can all mount up to a sense of alienation—alienation from one another, from God, from our culture. Writing in the 1st century, roughly 60 AD, Peter sends a letter to people from across five regions, to people of different origins, ethnicities, customs and political histories. And says: "[To those who are elect exiles \(aliens\) of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.](#)" Today, we're starting a new series in what Luther called "*a paragon of excellence*," St Peter's first letter, an excellent letter to exiles. What kind of exiles? Let's find out by looking at the: 1) Historical, **cultural context**: similarity/dissimilarity. 2) its **essential hope**; it's drive. What gets Peter (& the church) up in the morning, through very difficult times;. 3) Finally, its **practical wisdom**, its astuteness on how life is meant to be lived.

Cultural Context

This **map** shows the five regions to which Peter wrote. They are in modern day Turkey. And you can imagine it would represent an incredibly diverse group of people. Yet Peter does something no other NT writer does—he piles them all together and calls them **exiles**. Why does he call them exiles? What kind of exile? There are different theories on this which I'll get into next week but for now two options. Some suggest *physical persecution*, but the real aggressive persecution of Domitian doesn't start until the end of the century. And there is no mention of state-sponsored killing in the letter. What about *cultural exile*? It's a fact that Jews had legal protection for practicing their faith under Roman rule dating back to 70 B.C., but Gentile converts had no such protection. This letter is largely written to Gentile converts whose worship of Christ was not culturally acceptable. Sticking out like a Christian in the Middle East. Perhaps worse, 1st century Christians were called *atheists*. Why *because they worshipped an invisible God*, a rejection of the visible gods of Roman culture. Now why would this lead to alienation? *Because refusing to worship Diana and Zeus was believed to invoke divine judgment*. Crops fail and fertility cursed **because Christians refused to adore the powers of the culture**. As a result, Christians were considered anti-social (haters of society). They were exiled within their own cultures. And this is where things intersect, where Christians today experience similar marginalization. First century dominant culture used theological terminology to judge Christians—calling them atheists. Today, secularists use the biblical idea of shame and sin, to publically shame Christians for praying for secular Paris. Humanists co-opted the idea of church to create the London Assembly for public worship of reason. If you're drawn to secular belief, you have to ask yourself is it intellectually credible to use Christian theology to judge others or erect your own faith in reason? If you are committed to Jesus, you have to ask am I willing to be a cultural exile? And how should I respond to alienation?

Essential Hope

Many Christians respond to "exile" by putting their hope in cultural credibility. They go to great lengths to assure their neighbors and friends that they are not weird, and that in fact,

you can be cool and be Christian. You seek **cultural relevance**. You strive to be up to date on film, pop culture, attire, music, tech. In Austin our cultural relevance is more nuanced. Our artists aren't discovered, our films independent, our food local, tech homegrown. When exile comes knocking, you tend to object by showing you are relevant, up to date. You have a tendency to imbibe cultural views, absorb the new morality, and even impress secular culture *with your relevance*. You want the approval, not the exile. Now what if you took just some of all that energy/money/time to gain cultural relevance and redirected it to being a chosen exile, to living in the story of the Bible? **Have you compromised your exile status?** Others respond to exile by placing their hope in changing culture. Justice, politics, just being angry. They seek **cultural dominance**. This position is more assertive. It is more critical. You're prone to attack or withdraw. It compromises its exile status by trying to build a Christian America, often viewing politics instead of the church as the vehicle of the gospel. It's goal is to dominant, legislate, rule over, even enforce its moral and even theological views onto others, rejecting the freedom of religion America was founded on. This person tends to get heated in political conversations. If this is you you probably post more on politics than on Jesus. You may be marginalized but not for Peter's reasons. What then are Peter's reasons, how would he have us respond to marginalization and judgment? 1 Peter 3:9, "**Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.**" You were called, chosen (exiles) not to relevance or dominance but to blessing, to serving, loving not cursing. So, depending where you lean, you may need to dismount a political or a cultural high horse, to blending in and thinking you are better than those irrelevant Christians or to from hurling insults thinking you are better than all the immoral non-Christians. **Instead, embrace God's calling, choosing, to be an exile of hope.** Hope is neither passive nor aggressive; it does not strive for relevance or dominance. Instead, it operates on a different plane. It steps out of the cultural moment, refuses to be defined by it, views *everything* from the "eternal moment." Hope takes the perspective of heaven. **Hope is essential to true exile.** Peter shows us why. **Hope** for Peter what is faith for Paul. It is the stuff, the heart, the essence of Christianity. Its what gets you up in the morning and keeps you going when things get hard. It keeps you from drifting. You say hope in what? **Peter expresses hope sometimes in an event other times in an age, but always in a person.** **Age:** last time (1:5), from heaven (1:7), manifest in these last times (1:20), end of all things at hand (4:7). He's referring to a time or age in which the exile hopes. **Event:** revelation of Jesus Christ (1:7, 15), day of visitation (2:12), when his glory is revealed (4:13), and our glory to be revealed (5:1, 4), eternal glory dominion and power (5:10,11). Whats the event? The event is what some call the Christ event—life, death, resurrection, and particularly the *return* of Jesus Christ. That's the essential hope that causes exiles to bless when they're cursed, endure when they suffer, to love not judge the brethren. HOPE. The letter opens with it: "**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 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**" (1:3-5). Living hope is future hope. **Christ came from the future into the present, and brought some of heaven with him which climaxed in his physics-rupturing act of resurrection.** Life climbed out of death, and we climb out with him. As we do this living hope spills out of our resurrection life...if you're hoping in the future return of Jesus not the present love of the world, if you are embracing exile status

not cultural relevance/dominance, if the risen Christ and his costly grace is precious to you. If so, you bless, you rejoice in hard times, you brim with golden grace in the face of decadent temptation. Why? Because you live toward the future. Because you've tasted the true grace of God (5:12) and it is Jesus shaped. Because you've apprehended the glory of Christ and you can't wait for salvation to be revealed at the last time. **Hope is essential to an exile.** Now, you might object to this saying how am I supposed to hope in something I can't see, or even be sure of, **how does what I believe about the future change the present?** Well, you actually do it all the time. Have you ever checked the weather, and anticipating the forecast, put an umbrella by the door? Your belief about the future changed the present. Has your stock analysis and trends in the market ever led you to invest heavily in a stock? Your hope in a future upturn led to sacrifice in the present. [at the prospect of a greater career quit your job?]"*We act on future hope all the time. Hope is living toward the future, with the future reaching back for us.*" Witmer. Where is your hope? **What future do you really want?** Cultural relevance/dominance, the glory of Christ?

Practical Wisdom

How does exile hope change the present? Peter will show us: in our pursuit of character, the way we relate authority, our gospel witness, love for one another, and how we respond in suffering. Let me close by showing you one way hope in the future changes the present. Exile hope changes how we **suffer**. We are all going into suffering, in suffering, or coming out of suffering. How you suffer makes all the difference. Peter writes, "[Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed](#)" (4:12-13). How does future hope affect suffering? Two related reasons. **1) Suffering aligns us with the suffering savior. Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings.** When you share something with a friend, it increases your joy. When you see a movie together, or read the same book, or suffer the same hardship, it brings you closer. Last week my mother's heart stopped, and my Dad saw her flatline. They were shouting "Stay with us." My Dad kept thinking no, she has so much more to do, not now Lord. My Mom came back and they're working on a solution. And you know what my Mom said this weekend when I asked her how she's doing? Your Dad is being a great help to me. My Dad confided, through tears, how moved he was in his love for her in her suffering. As they suffer together, they are getting closer. **When we suffer with Jesus, we get closer to the suffering servant.** Suffering can get us close to the God who bears our burdens and our sins. When you are snubbed, gossiped, marginalized, rejected, experience loss, it lines you up with the God who suffers (unjustly) for the world. **2) Suffering shows you future glory.** Peter also says we can rejoice *when* we suffer because we look to when his glory will be revealed. The promise of Christ's glory being revealed can motivate joyful suffering. There's joy in the suffering because you have an actual promise that glory is coming. Why is that helpful? Because the eternal glory of Christ shows us how temporary and fleeting our suffering is, mere shadows that dance before the sun. When we are enthralled with Christ, and his coming glory, his beauty, his greatness, his grace eclipses our temporary afflictions in such a way that we actually see more of him. Its like the dark night time sky which allows the stars to shine brilliantly. We don't criticize the darkness for being dark or making things hard; we marvel at the light. That's what hope does. It marvels at the light of the glory and beauty of Christ. **For those with exile hope, suffering is a**

gateway to glory. When I asked how my mom was doing, she shared how grateful she was for a number of things. I said it can be hard to practice gratitude in suffering, and then my mom said, “Gratitude is the light that brings you out of the tunnel.” Indeed, gratitude is the proof we are hoping in the future. It sees the return of Christ and loves the return of Christ and praise the return of Christ and connects us to the light, the glory at the end of time. So you see, what you believe about the future changes the present. It makes a softer, happier person in suffering. Will you hope in the return of Christ this year? You’ll be eternally glad you did.