

A Holy Engagement with the World

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Ewan. Good morning, everyone. Matt and Ali, if you've not met before, and the minister here, really good to see you this morning, really good to be able to be together. I thought as we just started our time together looking at this passage, it would be good to have your Bibles open in front of you and have those words, those verses that Ewan just read.

And I'd also like you to imagine that suddenly you are dropped in a new country, in a different part of the world, and you're told that this is where you're going to be living for the rest of your life.

The weather is different, the clothing is different, the food is different, the language is different. I imagine you would probably pretty quickly be asking yourself the question, what do I do?

How am I supposed to live here in this place? How do I conduct myself in this strange land? How do I stay true to myself, to who I am, while also taking seriously the fact that I now live somewhere radically different?

We're not going to be sending anyone into exile, I'm afraid you don't have the budget for that. But our verses this morning are going to deal with that question in a spiritual sense.

[1 : 1 5] Remember, one of the big themes, the big ideas of 1 Peter is that God's people are exiles in the world, wherever it is that we live.

So although we might wear the same clothes and speak the same language as those around us, actually we are not truly at home, because as we've read, heaven is our true and eternal home being kept for us.

And so it's a great question to ask, but if that's the case, if that is where our true home is, how do we live in this world, in the here and now? That's what we're going to see over the next few weeks, really.

We're moving into a new section here in 1 Peter, really the central section of the book, which deals with that very question, how God's people are to live in a world which is not their eternal home.

And it's an answer we're going to see that ties together really three of the big themes that we've spoken about in 1 Peter, that theme of our identity, who we are as those people that we are, elect exiles, as we read right back in the first verse.

[2 : 2 3] Another big theme of our purpose, what we are here for. Remember, last week we saw to proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous life, the purpose that God gives us.

But also the third big aspect of 1 Peter, and we've touched on this previously, but now it kind of comes front and centre, the idea of our conduct. How we live out that identity, that purpose in the world around us.

And really the big picture for this central section is laid out for us in verses 11 and 12, and then that principle is worked out in various different areas of life over the next chapter.

So this morning we're going to look at that main principle, we're going to dig into that in verses 11 and 12, and then we're going to see that in action in the first two areas that Peter writes about, in society and in the workplace.

We've got a big principle, and then two applications of that. Okay, well here's the headline, and here's the key principle, that God's people are to live holy lives in the world, that the world might give glory to God.

[3 : 42] That God's people are to live holy lives in the world, that the world might give glory to God. Let me read verses 11 and 12. Do follow along.

It says this, And there's the big principle.

We could call this approach of holy engagement, I think. How would we assume, if we hadn't read the Bible, if we hadn't looked at this passage, how would we assume that we would live as exiles?

I suppose there's two extremes you might come to there. There's two options that might come to mind. The first is to say, well if we're exiles, it doesn't matter how we live. You know, this isn't our home, and so who cares?

I've heard this called before, the house party approach. You know, someone's parents are away, there's a party at their house, everyone turns up, but it's not their home. And so how they act, what happens to the house, to the carpets, to the fish, that just doesn't matter in the slightest, anything goes.

[5 : 04] So there's one approach. We're exiles here, so it doesn't matter how we live. Or the other extreme is that we think we need to protect our identity so much, that actually our conduct is so important that we can't risk it coming into contact with people who are different from us, who might challenge us, or who might change us.

This is more of a kind of a new sofa approach. You've got a brand new sofa, it's all clean, there's no marks on it, and so no one is allowed anywhere near it. You've got a new sofa, you know, sitting on it, you know, in case it gets tainted somehow, or that temptation to kind of retreat away from the world.

So two extremes there, that the Peter's approach, really, the Bible's approach, rejects both of those, and calls us instead, as we said, to this holy engagement.

It does matter how we live. That's what this whole central section of 1 Peter is about. Peter's already said, be holy, for God is holy. Our conduct matters hugely.

But then also that we do that and engage with the world. We live that hour, as it says in verse 12, among the Gentiles, among those who don't know God.

[6 : 21] Because people are not called to be in a holy huddle, but to be part of, to be engaged with the world in which we live. A holy engagement.

That's kind of the headline here. And so a couple of questions before we look at the specific different areas. What does that look like, is question one. And what is it for, is question two.

Or what it looks like, question one, is verse 11. And abstaining from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Now I don't know about you, Rick, but I found that an incredibly encouraging verse.

That Peter can write all about the identity we have as God's people through Jesus. That he's been emphasising throughout this letter. But still say, that involves a battle.

And still use this warfare language in terms of resisting temptation. I found that encouraging because that is my experience in day-to-day life.

[7 : 22] That although we're exiles, we still face the same temptations of the world around us. And the same temptations as the world around us.

We're not unaffected by our world. And yet Peter is calling us to live out our identity of who we truly are. And the idea of soul, verse 11, isn't referring to something kind of vague or even something spiritual here.

Really, it means, in this context, it means the new you. It's talking about the real you, reborn through Christ. That children of God, that identity that makes us exiles, is kind of pounded, is assaulted by the temptations of the world.

And yet, Peter says, we're called to resist that by remembering who we are in Christ. And so that's one part of it, turning away from sin.

The other side of the coin, as well as resisting sin, is to embrace what is good. And so Peter goes on to write in verse 12, Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable.

[8 : 31] That our lives would reflect the character of God. And that that would be consistent over every area of life, as Peter is about to lay out in the coming chapters.

And so that's what holy engagement looks like. Battling against sin, living out holy conduct in the midst of others. And what is the result then? Second question.

Well, Peter answers that in the second half of verse 12. He says, so that, and here's the result, So that, when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

And Peter comes back to that big idea of our mission as God's people, doesn't it? That the people would see God's goodness through the lives of his people.

And we said last week, and we're often worried when it comes to sharing our faith, when it comes to speaking up to God, we're often worried that we don't know what to say. Or we feel that we don't have all the answers at hand.

[9 : 38] And yet Peter emphasises here what one commentator calls the remarkable power of a life of simple godliness. And actually we don't need all of the answers.

We don't need to be the cleverest person in the room. But we can bear witness simply by how we live in the mundane and in the day-to-day. And so there will be times when living a Christian life means getting sick, when it means being willing to go through suffering.

But the Bible is saying here that there will also be times where just the beauty of a godly life will be evident to all. And so think of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And the idea here being able to live those out, even among the pressures of the world, when other people start to snap at each other or to crack, being able to live out that life of simple godliness shows a better story, a better identity, a better God.

And as I noticed in verse 12 as well, it says that they speak about you as evildoers. And there's a lot of focus coming up in one picture about what people will say about Christians.

[10 : 58] It's one of the things that makes it a really contemporary letter. The idea of being slandered, being insulted will both come up. Christians in the first century were called mischievous superstition.

Those of evil practices, even labeled as cannibals at various points in the early church. We think in the same way today, Christians can be labeled bigots or backwards or part of something intellectually indefensible or stupid.

And what Peter says, actually, it's our godly lives, our holy engagement, that can correct people's view of Christians and Christianity to the point where they may even put their trust in Jesus and still give glory to God on the day of his return.

And doesn't that just give incredible significance to our conduct? Peter doesn't ask of people, Peter doesn't ask of us this morning that we need to go out and change the world, that we need to kind of assume great power, that we need to all be leaders in our field.

In fact, the examples we're just about to look at are all people who are under authority. All authority. And that this passage is telling us that wherever we are, that God can use us and our lives, our refusal to join in the gossip, or our respect for those we might disagree with, or whatever else it might be.

[12 : 24] God can use those simple things to turn people to him for his glory and for their ultimate good. So three kind of really practical steps, I suppose, needed for this that we'll just rattle through now.

First, that means living among people, doesn't it? To be able to be part of this holy engagement, being alert to the relationships, the interactions that we regularly have. Second, that means people knowing that we're Christians.

So what did you do this weekend? I was at church on Sunday, or telling someone you were praying for them, or weaving a Christian book or a Bible around, singing Jesus loves me, this I know, on the swings, whatever it is that works for you, that is known.

And thirdly, it means, as we've just seen, that simple but that hard work of fighting against sin and living our honourable conduct among those we know and who know us.

That work that God, through his Holy Spirit, promises to help us with, that he might use the remarkable power of a life of simple godliness that is glory.

[13 : 38] And so that was a big kind of overview of Peter's vision, of the Bible's vision, for how we're to live as God's people, as exiles in the world. It's not the kind of monastic life of detachment, nor is it unthinking and indistinct assimilation with everyone else.

Instead, it is this much more complex of the biblical pattern of holy engagement, that God's people are to live holy lives in the world, and that the world might give glory to God.

Okay, well, let's look at the first two areas where Peter shows us this principle in practice. As I mentioned earlier, in society and in the workplace.

So work example number one, holy engagement in society, and this is verses 13 down to 17. What does this resisting the passions of the flesh, what does honourable conduct look like in our society, in public life, or civic life, you might call it.

Really, this is dealing with how we live within the government systems we have, in a way that leads to people, as Peter says, seeing our good deeds and glorifying God.

[14 : 54] And what does that look like? Well, Peter says it in black and white here, doesn't he, that it means being subject to human authorities. Verse 13, Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor, the supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

You can think of it why Peter would start here with this point, our place in governmental society, as it were. This whole letter has been about how this world is not our ultimate home, and as part of that, a consequence of that, is that human authority is not our ultimate authority.

And you can see how it's a very short step to go from there to that kind of house party approach we mentioned earlier that says, well, in that case, who cares? You know, God is my king, and so I'm not going to listen to anyone else.

I'm just going to do whatever I want. But, Peter says, we live out our calling as God's people. We live as God, as our king, by submitting to this human authority.

Why? Well, verse 15, for this is the will of God. That by doing good, you should silence the ignorance of foolish people.

[16 : 17] It's that pattern again that we saw, that people won't be able to speak ill of or speak misinformed rumors about Christianity. You know, they're nothing but trouble. We'd be better off without them, or you know what those Christians are like.

But instead, as Christians, according to the law and order, as Christians are engaged and do good in their communities, in their societies, that actually people would recognize that Christians are good citizens.

People would see that actually the more Christians, the better for a society. And actually, that might start that pathway for people to consider the basis, the foundation of the Christian life, Jesus Christ himself, for themselves.

So again, how do we kind of apply this to us in the church? I'm having you to survey the population of Paddington this week and ask them just one simple question.

Do you think an evangelical church is a good thing for our community? Well, perhaps you could make that question slightly more specific. Would you rather have a Bible-believing church or an M&S; food set up in Paddington?

[17 : 33] I think actually if we ask that question, we have to probably be honest, the church wouldn't figure that highly on that survey. People don't always speak well of Christians.

There have been various places across Scotland where Bible-believing churches have been opposed from carrying out building projects or from meeting in certain spaces. In a number of those places that our position was shown to be illegal.

But it still reflects, I think, people's attitude toward Christianity or people might say about it that the negative connotations that it often brings. And so how do we work against that?

Well, Peter says it's being good, law-abiding citizens. It's being good neighbours. It's finding ways we serve and benefit our society working within those structures that we have.

Just in case that all sounds a bit weak, Karl Marx famously said, religion is the opium of the masses, that religion is just another tool to prop up the establishment.

[18 : 38] Is that what Peter is saying here? Actually, it's absolutely not. Have a look at verse 17 and we see what Peter writes is incredibly subversive here. He says, honour everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the emperor.

Now, I notice that having that verse the emperor at the close and everyone at the start are on that same level as those to be honoured.

That would be incredibly counter-cultural in Peter's day where the emperor ruled above all things almost as a divine figure to relativise the honour that he deserves among everyone else.

And then as well as that, notice that it is God alone who is to be feared. That actually God stands above it all. And that is the kind of thought that could get you killed in the Roman empire, especially under the emperor Nero, which is when 1 Peter was most likely written.

So Peter isn't saying just go with the flow, just do the same as everyone else, just kind of suck up to the powerful people. And Peter is telling the church that we are radically different, that we are exiles, that we have a different ultimate authority, that if people, if those things do come into conflict, that it has to be God that has our ultimate allegiance.

[20 : 03] And yet we live out that allegiance, that freedom not to do whatever we want, but to submit to authority, which the Bible says that God has ordained, that government is a gift from God.

We model this holy engagement as we see it, in order that people might give glory to God. And so there's work example number one of this principle, holy engagement in society.

And then verses 18 to 25, the rest of chapter 2, is all about this holy engagement in the workplace. And if you look at verse 18, you'll see it starts with that same instruction that slaves, workers, are called to be subject to their masters.

Same words. In fact, we don't really like the idea of being subject to, and actually it gets even tougher in the rest of that verse, where Peter continues, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

people and now remember, this is going to tell us about how to act in the workplace, I think that's right, but it's also good to highlight here that there is not an exact correlation between today's employee-employer relationship and the slave-master relationship common in New Testament times.

[21 : 28] However your workplace might feel, those things are not identically the same, the servants that Peter is addressing here, they didn't have the option to try and change departments or to put their CVs in a few other places or even just to quit and to leave.

And so this passage is not saying that if you're in a terrible workplace at the moment that you can't try and move on, I think it's worth saying that. But at the same time, lots of people here will know the experience of having not a great boss, maybe a really bad boss, but you are stuck somewhere for whatever reason.

Or you feel called to that place. So it's not an issue you'd leave over, it's just something non-ideal. So what are your options in that situation? Well the world would say, in that case, if you're not getting good stuff, if you're not being treated well, you can slack off, you can not bother working too hard, you can just quiet quit, you can join in all the gossip and the backbiting about management kind of things.

My sister was a teacher at one school she had this head teacher who was really hard work, actually that was all everyone spoke about in the staff room, this kind of adversarial environment, this ask against them, this bang bang, can you believe what they have done?

Maybe you've experienced that in a workplace in which you've been. been. The picture applies this principle of holy engagement, again, to say actually the best witness to God, whatever the work you've owned, however positive or negative that might be, is to work hard, to do your job well, to engage, to be subject to, and that absolutely doesn't mean not trying to change things that are wrong, but it does mean not responding sinfully to those things.

[23 : 27] Hopefully most of us have good bosses that we work with and we can submit to, but even if that involves suffering, Peter invokes that same principle, verse 20, not to sin but to do good for the glory of God.

That same pattern being put into the workplace and how we engage there. And it's here as we come to a close, I think here's perhaps the most incredible bit of this whole passage.

How are we supposed to do something as mundane as getting on with our work even when our superiors are not treating us as we should? How do we resist that human temptation that we all feel to bite back or to vent about things on social media or WhatsApp or just to not bother, just give the bare minimum?

Peter here incredibly brings the full weight of the eternal and glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to bear on these frustrations that we feel in our lifetime.

How do we do this submission to authority for the glory of God? I think this is whether it's employment authority or whether this is governmental, social authority, whatever it might be.

[24 : 49] How do we manage to be people who submit to that graciously? Well, what 1 Peter says, remember that God sees. And so see the end of verse 20 there.

Enduring in doing good through suffering is a gracious thing in the sight of God. When we might feel overlooked, when we might feel slighted, the truth is that God is always watching over us.

And so this holy engagement may well have an effect on those around us, as Peter said, it can change how they speak about those people, people, but our ultimate, our primary audience, as it were, it is God watching over us as his people.

And so first encouragement as we seek to live this out is to remember that God sees us. And that secondly, we can live this out because of the example of Jesus.

And so have a look there at verse 21 down to the end of our passage. See what it says there, that because Christ suffered, because he was reviled, but in that committed no sin and continued to entrust himself to God, to him who judges justly, and he did that for us, that he suffered for our sins on the cross, that we might be brought into his family to live for him.

[26 : 18] And it is to remember now that it enables us to put aside those passions of the flesh in whatever form they take. The desire to be first, the desire to get even, the refusal to submit, and instead knowing our eternal security in Jesus, through his suffering in our place, and be able to deal with the hardships that come, to continue in honourable conduct, even when we're sinned against, and to have a hope and a value that doesn't depend on us getting our way, or us being first, or our grievances in the head, but rather in the identity we have in Christ through his ministry, who himself submitted, who suffered, and who went as low as it is possible to go, the crucifixion of the cross, that we might be raised up and be found in him.

And it's as we follow his example, confident in our identity in him, and so that even in suffering we can keep on turning away from sin and living out what is good, that through that, when Jesus is our foundation, when Jesus is our cornerstone, that people might see our good deeds and glorify God on that day when Jesus will return, that day that we live in light of.

And so let me read then, verse 21, down to the end of our passage, this amazing reminder of what Jesus has done, which enables us to follow that path, and then we'll pray together. And but Peter writes this, for today you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you may follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him, who judges justly.

He himself wore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, and for you are straying like sheep that have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

[28 : 40] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that in your great mercy you have brought us back to you, shepherd and overseer of our souls.

We thank you that you did that for us at the greatest possible cost, the death of Jesus who bore our sins upon the cross. We thank you that through his wounds, and his wounds alone, we have been healed.

We thank you for the freedom that you have brought us in the gospel. people, and we pray that we would use that freedom to live as your people, that we would use that freedom to be turning away from sin and living our good, consistent, honourable conduct in the world in which we live.

We pray that you would help us to be engaged with people, that you would help us to be engaged with the world around us, and in that engagement to live in that manner which would move people to speak well of you, that people's antagonism or apathy toward Christianity might be challenged by the loving way in which we live our lives, and by that remarkable power of a life of simple godliness.

We pray this week as we return to what can often feel mundane or ordinary, the places where we wonder if we're making any difference whatsoever, we pray that in your strength we would live out this holy engagement, that we would be willing and able to not always be seeking our own advancement, not to always have to get even, but by being able to have peace in you, whatever happens, that we would encourage people to seek after the hope that comes from the security of being your people, and that hope that is only found in the gospel, and that people as well might want to find out more about Jesus, that people might want to turn to him and receive that forgiveness that only people want, and so glorify him on that day on which he returns.

[30 : 49] So please be with us this week, Lord, and help us to live as your people for your glory, who pray all this in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen. you will By