

10/27/19 **Citizens in Exile** - Immerse: Messiah: Mark, 1&2 Peter, Jude
Text: 1 Peter 2:9-25

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed young Carter staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. The plaque was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside him and said quietly, "Good morning, Carter."

"Good morning, Pastor," replied the young boy, still focused on the plaque. Then he asked, "Pastor Anne, what is this?"

"Well, Carter, it's a memorial to all the men and women who have died in the service."

Soberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Little Carter's voice was barely audible when it finally broke through the silence, "Which service pastor...the 9AM or the 10:30?"

When we think about sacrifice and service, that's about as close as we want to get. And citizens of the USA, we live in a world where we can choose what service, sacrifice, or even suffering, that we will experience. Some people will choose it by training for a marathon. Others will choose it by giving more than a small portion of their income, and still others will choose it by living as foreigners in other countries, working with beautiful people in not-so-beautiful conditions.

But some sociologists, missiologists and futurists predict that in my lifetime, or maybe the next generation's lifetime, living as a follower of Jesus in this country will mean experiencing suffering and sacrifice as a daily reality, not a noble choice.

We may not want to choose a life of service, suffering and sacrifice, but that's the life Jesus lived, and it's the life he calls us to, so let's consider why we should choose it, and if we are already experiencing it, how we can choose joy in it.

I want to be clear, I'm not assuming you want to live a life of service, suffering and sacrifice...in fact, even though all of us are inspired by those that do live everyday that way, most of us try to avoid it.

It may sound like I'm trying to convince you, but I'm actually trying to convince myself too. And if you hang with me, you'll see how it all connects and just what it can look like today.

First, we should choose it because Jesus lived it.

In Mark's story of Jesus, he repeatedly emphasized that service, suffering and sacrifice are the marks of God's true Savior.

- Three times in the middle of Mark's story, he shows that Jesus is the real chosen one, and to be chosen to save all people, the Savior must sacrifice his life. And all 3 times, Jesus' students respond with pride or confusion.
- It's easy to think his students were clueless and we would be so much smarter, much more humble and in tune with Jesus, but if his family and his disciples didn't get it, why would you or I think we would be any different?
- It took Peter denying Jesus, watching him die hung on a cross, and seeing him ALIVE again for him to be changed, but once this happened and he received God's Holy Spirit, he was never the same...by the time he wrote the letters known as 1st and 2nd Peter, he had embraced service, suffering and sacrifice because he had embraced Jesus and his resurrection.

Listen to how he describes this in 1 Peter 4:12-14 NLT

12 Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. 13 Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. 14 If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.

He is saying, since Jesus lived it, we should not only choose it, we should expect it.

- This is so counter to our culture, and maybe even our intuition, but I think Peter internalized something: when we suffer on earth, we more clearly see the glory of eternity.

Stephen, who was one of the seven chosen to help with the food distribution in the early church, sees the glory of Jesus next to God in heaven while he is being executed.

Peter said it like this in 1 Peter 1:3-5 NLT

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, 4 and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. 5 And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

These aren't just poetic words to Peter, this a picture of a new reality. Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead to new life, the whole world can now have new life.

When you or I, or anyone, believes in Jesus as the Savior and Son of God, we have new life, new future and a new inheritance.

That connects to the second reason we should choose a life of suffering, service and sacrifice...

2. We should choose it because it reminds us of our new identity.

- No matter where you have come from or what you have done in your past, you have a new identity and are part of a new family.

Peter wrote to a diverse groups of people scattered throughout many countries in the Roman empire, but notice how he identifies them in 1 Peter 2:9a, 10a, 11a NLT

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession.

10 "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people.

11 Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

When you trust Jesus as Savior and Lord, you become part of God's faithful family. Peter used language that would connect these people back to God's big story. He starts his letter by calling the followers of Jesus, "scattered, temporary residents and foreigners," and he ends his letter by saying, 1 Peter 5:13 NLT Your sister church here in Babylon sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark.

Let's connect a few big dots...it's like seminary for everyone, and for free.

- In God's big story, God's faithful family starts with a couple named Abraham and Sarah, who are called by God out of Ur, in Babylon, the place where the tower of Babel was built; the pinnacle of human rebellion and total autonomy from God.
- Abraham and Sarah's journey to the promised land that will be different than Babylon, actually like the Garden of Eden, but instead of inhabiting the promised land, their descendants end up back in exile in Babylon after decades, even centuries, of rebellion against God.
- Babylon became a symbol for any human empire that elevates human wisdom over God, and expects total allegiance to their values and whatever gods they worship.
- Peter tells them Rome is the new Babylon.

This is what Peter is trying to connect them to... Remember Jesus? Remember Daniel, Jeremiah, even Esther, Joseph and Abraham? They all lived as exiles, and yet citizens of God's kingdom. They didn't violently resist, passively submit, or hide in holy huddle; instead they participate as exiled citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

That participation is part of the third reason we should a life of suffering, service and sacrifice—

3. We should choose it because it brings clarity to our new priorities.

Listen to the surprising ways Peter tells them to engage: Submit to all human authority... 1 Peter 2:17-18 NLT Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king. 18 You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.

This is so easy to ignore or mock because we seem so much more evolved than the humans that wrote the Bible.

His talk of submission sound naive at best. When he tells them, respect the king or in another translation, honor the emperor, it sounds outdated in our democratic nation, and we don't even have a category for his comment about slaves and masters because of our own country slavery based on color or country.

But lean in and be critical thinkers...Their slavery was reality because of limited technology, poverty and survival...anyone could become a slave it was not based on where you came from or what ethnicity you were. And although you could earn your way out of slavery, while you were a slave, you were considered property. So the fact that Peter addresses slaves as humans with dignity is RADICAL.

Even so, the call to endure unjust suffering has allowed many abuses to continue in workplaces, schools, homes and marriages, then and still today. Is this really saying people should just put up with unfair treatment, injustice, and abuse?

This isn't saying people simply remain passive when they are suffering. When unfairness, injustice or abuse occur, people think that they either have to aggressively resist or oppressively submit. But Peter gives them and us a third way.

Peter learned this third way from Jesus. Jesus followed this pattern from exiled citizens like Daniel, Jeremiah, Esther, Joseph and even Abraham who engage in those empires as God's agents of blessing because we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

- They offered their best efforts to seek the peace and prosperity of their Babylons, but critiqued their idolatrous values and refused to join in their worship of other gods.
- Jesus too, was an exiled citizen, both loyal and subversive, to his Babylon.

Peter probably told Mark the story he recorded about Jesus being asked about paying taxes to the Roman Empire by the religious and political leaders. No doubt it was to trap him.

Mark 12:14b-17 NLT

...is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay them, or shouldn't we?"

Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Why are you trying to trap me? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you." 16 When they handed it to him, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

17 "Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."

Whose image? Jesus critiqued and resisted their worship of power, money, and desires, and he brought truth, healing and hope in surprising ways to people outside of his spiritual circle.

God did not merely sympathize with human sufferings; He stepped out of eternity into Earth's time and space through Jesus. Rather than lead a rebellion against the evil empires of his day and declare himself as Earth's next Emperor, Jesus chose a third way.

- Jesus served God by healing and helping others.
- Jesus led others by loving and serving them.
- He became first by putting himself last.
- He should have received praise, honor and respect, but instead humans despised, rejected and killed him.
- When Jesus suffered, God suffered too. But it was through his earthly suffering that he redeemed us from our eternal suffering.

The cross is God's answer to the question, "Why don't you do something about evil?" God did do something—and what He did was so powerful that it ripped in half, from top down, the entire fabric of the universe.

- If someone had rescued Jesus from His suffering, Jesus could not have rescued us from ours. It's through His suffering we find healing and wholeness, even in our suffering.
- And it's not only how we are rescued, it's how everyone can be rescued and it's how the whole world is made whole, because when we unjustly suffer, people can see the unjust suffering of Jesus, the Son of God.
- I love how Joni Eareckson Tada says it, "God allows what He hates to achieve what He loves."

It's through Jesus' suffering we are rescued and restored with God, and it's how we showcase that to others.

Peter tells them, and us, because I believe these priorities are for Jesus' followers in 2019 as well. We are to be exiled citizens, both loyal and subversive to our Babylons:

- Difficulty is an opportunity. God often uses suffering to proclaim His salvation.
- When you get treated like a servant and you joyfully embrace it, people notice.
- When you are persecuted and you don't push back, people notice.
- When you show respect to all people and honor (even wicked) rulers, people notice.
- When you quietly resist the worship of other people or things, people will notice.
- When you give your total loyalty to God, and you speak surprising truth of Jesus and show the generous love of Jesus, people notice...especially if you are doing it from a place of sacrifice.
- But even if they don't notice, God knows and notices.
- When the Empire's political and religious powers executed Jesus, they thought they had won. But when God raised Jesus from the dead, He declared Jesus vindicated and victorious.

This is why our vision is to join with Jesus to transform communities. We are God's agents of blessings in this world.

Close in prayer.