

CONDUCT YOURSELVES WITH FEAR

1 Peter 1:17-21

Imagine for a moment that you've been taken out of where we are in rural Summit-Waller and transported to a far away land. Most of you have probably watched enough movies or TV shows... so you can picture that moment that drives the plot line of certain stories, when the main character suddenly wakes up in a place that is totally unfamiliar to them. Think E.T. arriving on planet earth, or Eddie Murphy on the streets of Queens in Coming to America. You're a stranger in a strange land.

OK? Are you imagining? You open your eyes to find yourself right in the middle of the main street of an overcrowded foreign city. Late-model cars honking and spewing exhaust are buzzing around you. Street vendors push their carts along the sidewalk calling for customers. As you take a deep breath, the smells of spices and grilled meats and gasoline overwhelm your senses. All around you is this chaotic symphony of sight and sound and smell. And everyone's eyes are on you.

If you've traveled outside of North America, maybe to Kenya (with API) or to Asia or South America, that picture is probably familiar to you. For my wife Eli and I, we experienced that sense of being a stranger in a strange land for about 10 years in China. I still remember the first weeks that I was there, in a city of 15 million people (half the size of Canada), being out on the streets and seeing stacks of mattresses being hauled on the back of three-wheel rickshaws, people riding home from the market with live chickens tied on to their bike, _____ *one more thing here*. Your first thought is - "we're not in Kansas anymore Toto."

And not only are you overwhelmed with these sights and smells that are totally new, but you're surrounded by a language that you've never heard before. I remember the first two Chinese words that I learned, I learned simply because I heard them everywhere I went. Whether I was in the market, or on the bus, or riding my bike somewhere, I constantly heard the words "gao" and "waiguoren". Well, I finally asked a friend what these words meant - and I found out why I was hearing them all the time around me. You see "gao" in Mandarin means tall, and "waiguoren" is the word for foreigner. It's no wonder I was hearing them all the time, because it's what people were saying when they saw this 6'5" white dude.

Now the word *waiguoren*, or foreigner, in Chinese literally means "outside country person". China isn't like America, it's not a country of immigrants, so anyone that doesn't look

Asian is automatically classified by locals as an outside country person. It really wouldn't matter if I had lived in China for forty years, spoke fluent Mandarin, ate Chinese food every day, carried live chickens home from the market on my bike, and hauled mattresses on a three-wheel rickshaw - I would still be a *waiguoren*, a foreigner, an alien, a stranger.

Well, this notion of being a foreigner, an alien, a stranger in a place that's not our home, this is the primary lens that Peter in this letter wants us to see the Christian life through. This is the paradigm that should shape our thinking about what it means to live as a follower of Jesus in this world. This isn't our home. Though you might carry an American passport, or like me have a green card (a certificate of permanent residence), the reality is that if you are a Christian, you are a temporary resident here.

Peter begins his letter by addressing us as elect exiles and in Chapter 2 he calls us sojourners and exiles, and here in this passage that we read this morning he's giving us instruction on how we're to live throughout the time of our exile. Do you see that this is the governing analogy for the Christian life that Peter has?

So throughout this entire book Peter is unpacking what it looks like for us to live life as exiles or sojourners, he's showing us what exilic living is. And what Peter says, and we started to get into it last week, is that there is something that marks us as exiles... People should look at us, they should observe our lifestyles, they should see our community, and say - *waiguoren*, foreigner - because we look different. And that thing that marks us, verses 15-16 say is holiness.

That word can trip us up, because there are all sorts of connotations that come both from inside the church and outside the church about what holiness means, what it is. But essentially to be holy means to be set apart, to look different than the world around us.

And there are two places that Peter is drawing this language of holiness and exile from. One is the sojourn, or the wandering of Israel in the wilderness, which is where this quote is v. 16 "Be holy as I am holy" comes from, and the other is the exile of God's people to Babylon.

Holiness in both these contexts, in both the wilderness and in Babylon, wasn't just an isolated personal holiness... I mean it involved that, but it wasn't just that... Neither was it a communal withdrawal from the world around them... Holiness for God's people meant an engagement with and witness to the world they were strangers in.

The prophet Jeremiah, addressing God's people in exile in Babylon, gave these commands from the Lord (Jer. 29:4-7). Do you see what God is saying through Jeremiah? He's

saying, "while you're in exile, waiting to go home, don't stop living. Settle in knowing this isn't your home, and work for the good of the place I've put you."

So do you see that holiness for exiles like us isn't conformity to the world we find ourselves in, but neither is it withdrawal from it. Holiness means we look different from the world, for the world. Are you tracking with that? We're not set apart for ourselves, but for God and for others.

So Peter sees these two things, holiness and exile, set apartness and life as sojourners and aliens, he sees them as inseparable pairs. Exilic living requires holy living and holy living is a non-negotiable of genuine exilic living. Do you see the connection here?

But we struggle to live holy lives, don't we? We become lethargic in our lifestyles, content with the sinful status quo. We'd rather keep our Christianity in a safe private corner of our lives than letting Jesus rule and reign. Sometimes we're not really interested in transformation. We stick to surface level conformity to what God's asking of us, but our hearts are still unchanged. We hold onto sin like a baby with their binky, not wanting to give up the childish comfort it brings us.

But this morning in these 5 verses God wants to move us toward a growing experience of exilic holiness. A holiness that has to begin with inward transformation, but that spills out on the outside world. What Peter writes here is meant to prod us forward, to stir us up toward godly living as individuals, as his church, and in our witness to the world around us. And the heart of what he wants to say to us is that what motivates us toward holy exilic living is a grace-empowered fear of God. This is the whole point of our passage today: A gospel-rich, grace-empowered fear of God fuels the holy living of sojourners and exiles.

Alright, let's begin to unpack that by diving into our text... Grab your Bibles and open them back up with me to the passage we read this morning - 1 Peter chapter 1:17-21. These five verses are actually a single sentence in the original Greek, so we've got a lot of content jammed into this single train of thought.

But the center of what Peter is saying is there in the second half of verse 17, and it's the heart of what we've already said this morning. Look at Peter's words: "conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile."

Peter is not just suggesting something here, he's not just giving us a helpful tip for successful living, he's giving us an imperative, a command... he's telling us that we need to pass the time of our exile, this incredibly short time that we have here on earth until we go home to

be with Jesus, this time that we live as distinctive foreigners in our families and our neighborhoods, and our workplaces, he's commanding us to live during this time with a holy fear.

Now what does it mean to fear? Fear is one of those words that can have a range of definitions. Fear can mean anything from terror or panic to awe and amazement. So which is it? What is the type of fear that Peter is wanting us to live in?

Well, it's certainly not terror, because Peter has just spent the entire first half of Chapter 1 putting before us the wonder of God's saving work in our lives through the gospel, so I don't think he's asking us to now live in terror of this God who's shown us mercy and adopted us and given us an inheritance, and who Peter says we believe in and love and rejoice in with joy inexpressible - I don't think he's asking us to cower in dread from this God.

So what is it, what is this fear? We tend to get this so confused because often as Christians we know instinctively that when the Bible talks about fearing God it's not talking about running away from him in abject terror, and so what we do is sort of explain away what it means to fear him by saying, "well, it just really means to respect him, to honor him."

But while this fear that we see played out in the stories of the Old Testament and that we see show up as the beginning of wisdom in Proverbs, and that we see even into the New Testament, while this isn't abject terror, neither is it merely something as diluted as honor or respect.

At the most fundamental level it's the type of fear that recognizes the incomprehensible divide between God as the Creator and me as his creature. This fear is the right response of a sinful servant before the throne of the Sovereign King. But the incredible thing that we're going to see in just a moment, is that God has crossed the divide between Creator and creature, he has stepped out of his kingly throne, and so for the Christian this fear of him is also the right response of a child with their Father.

So fearing God means recognizing his immeasurable worth and his unimaginable magnificence and his infinite value and his unending glory and being changed by it. To fear God is to rightly respond with all of who we are to all of who he is.

And we see that here in verse 17: "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear..."

The first thing that Peter is saying here is that fearing God, responding rightly to all that he is as Judge and Father motivates us toward holy exilic living.

Now, if you're like me you'd rather just skip over this whole part about God judging and talk about him as Father. But we need to deal with this statement about God's judgment. We know from v. 16 that God is holy and here Peter says that in line with that holiness he judges impartially - he makes judgment literally without seeing faces. In other words, God's judgment in one sense is like our picture of lady justice, eyes closed to the status or power or external circumstances of a person, a judgment that sees only their deeds.

And when we think about God as impartial judge, if you have not trusted in Jesus, the reality of God's holy impartial justice can only bring you terror. Without Jesus you will stand before the Judge with every deed exposed, every thought brought into the light, every hidden motivation laid bare, and there will be no plea bargaining, no back room negotiation, just you and the impartial judge. You need to feel the gravity of that. Without Jesus we stand naked before the judge...

But the glorious truth for those who are in Christ, who've put that trust in Jesus, is that for you the judge is also your Father. And so to fear his judgment is not to be afraid of eternal punishment, but to fear his fatherly discipline.

Hebrews 12 reminds us that every good earthly Father disciplines his children and so our heavenly father also disciplines those he loves. His correcting hand in our lives is the evidence of our status as sons and daughters. But Peter's reminder to us is that our heavenly father is not swayed by cuteness.

You see, I have four daughters, and one of them in particular... I won't mention which one.... right now has me wrapped around her finger. She's just so cute! And we might think that is special for a dad and daughter on an earthly level, but there are many times that I miss training her in the ways that she actually needs because I am so manipulated by her cuteness. Brothers and sisters, Peter is reminding us that we don't have God wrapped around our finger. As C.S. Lewis says about Aslan in the Chronicles or Narnia, "He's not a tame lion." He will discipline us and bring correction into our lives as we need it for our good and for his glory. He is both father and judge.

There is a scene in the Chronicles of Narnia, in Prince Caspian where Trumpkin, a good dwarf who is helping Caspian to retake his rightful place on the throne of Narnia, meets Aslan for the first time. As Aslan goes around talking with Peter, and Susan and Edmund, he eventually comes to Trumpkin. Let me read from Lewis:

"And now!" said Aslan in a much louder voice with just a hint of roar in it, "And now, where is this little Dwarf, Come here, son of Earth, come HERE!" -- and the last word was no longer the hint of a roar but almost the real thing.

Trumpkin jumps in near terror, but rather than running away he begins to tiptoe toward Aslan. But just as he's least expecting it, Aslan pounces on him.

Lewis writes: *Have you ever seen a very young kitten being carried in the mother cat's mouth? It was like that. The Dwarf, hunched up in a little, miserable ball, hung from Aslan's mouth. The Lion gave him one shake and all his armor rattled like a tinker's pack and then -- presto -- the Dwarf flew up in the air. He was as safe as if he had been in bed, though he did not feel so. As he came down the huge velvety paws caught him as gently as a mother's arms and set him (right way up, too) on the ground.*

This scene is summarized well by the beavers original description of Aslan. Susan, finding out that Aslan is a lion, asks the beavers cautiously, "Is he quite safe?" "Safe?" says Mr. Beaver, "Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king you know."

God's role as both Father and judge shows us something about what it means to fear him. He isn't tame. He isn't safe. But he is surely good. And Peter's reminder to us that he is both Father and judge shows us that with God intimacy and awe aren't opposites. Love and trembling are not mutually exclusive. For the Christian who knows God as Father and judge, fear doesn't drive us away from him, it draws us close, and motivates us toward the type of holy exilic living God asks of us.

Do you fear God like that? It should work in you what Wayne Grudem calls a "holy self-suspicion." A care about what would displease your heavenly Father. A desire to respond with all of who you are to all of who he is.

So the first thing that fuels our holy living is fearing God, knowing him, as Father and Judge. The second thing that Peter wants to say to us is that knowing the costly grace that redeemed us motivates us toward holy exilic living. Look at our text again:

"Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing (verse 18) that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

So Peter says - conduct yourselves with fear, be holy, set apart exiles for the glory of God and the good of the world - responding will all of who you are to all of who God is - and that all of that is motivated by a fear of God that is empowered by his grace demonstrated in the gospel.

In other words, there is an intimate dependency between fearing God and understanding and cherishing his grace.

The first thing we see about this grace is that it was costly. Some of your translations here might use the word "redeemed" in v. 18, but the ESV at least translates it "ransomed", which gives us a more clear understanding of what Peter is pointing to. Just like today in many parts of the world, slavery or indentured servitude was a part of life in the Roman Empire. But there was always the possibility that for a price a slave could be bought out of bondage and set free. They could be ransomed.

That is the meaning of this word here. Peter is saying that we have been ransomed, we've been set free from bondage. We've been redeemed from our futile way of life. Just as God rescued his people Israel from under Pharaoh's rule, we've also been rescued as Peter says in Chapter 2 - "out of darkness and into his marvelous light."

And this ransom came at a price. Look at the comparatives that Peter puts in here. You were ransomed out of your *futile* ways with the *precious* blood. Not with *perishable* things, but with a *perfect* lamb. Peter says it wasn't with silver or gold that you were ransomed, but with the blood of Jesus. This tells us the costliness of this grace. When we talk about earthly value, silver and gold are the most valuable things we can point to and Peter is saying about them - perishable, cheap, trash... compared to the treasure of Jesus Christ.

The second thing we see is that this was a planned grace. We've talked about this a couple of times in the past month. Salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus is not this haphazard rescue. It's not as if God just happened to be driving down I-5 and see us broken down by the side of the road and stopped to help. That's what Peter is saying here. Jesus, he says in v. 20 - was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world. In other words, in eternity past, God the Father, the first person of the Trinity, determined this plan of salvation to be accomplished through the eternal Son Jesus Christ. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but he was made manifest, this plan stopped being a mystery and become reality, in the last times for the sake of you.

You see, Jesus came to earth as the true foreigner. He left his heavenly home and came and lived as a stranger in a strange land. He experienced life in every way that we know it -

Hebrews says he was made like his brothers in every way. But unlike us, Jesus lived a perfect life. He perfectly feared the father, responding with all of who he was to all of who the Father is. Over and over, especially in the gospel of John, Jesus talks about his submission to the Father - his reverence for the Father. It's strange for us to think that this Jesus, who is God incarnate, feared God, but he did. And that fear put on display the glory of the Father every day in a life of holiness poured out for others. Jesus modeled what holiness looks like as he lived out a personal holiness that spilled out to everyone around him. And eventually Jesus went to the cross, to what Scripture ultimately calls his own exile, where in his flesh he bore the weight of our failure and refusal to fear God. And in his death and resurrection he made a way for the Creator to dwell with his creature. For the Father to bring back his kids.

This grace is a costly grace and it's a planned grace. Peter is saying that God is our Father, and our Judge, but he is also our redeemer. This redemption should motivate us to live in a way that puts on display the infinite value of the one who has set us free.

The Christian life, brothers and sisters, is about knowing and experiencing and treasuring that grace more and more. This is why we talk all the time about coming back to the grace of the gospel. Because it's the gospel that changes us. It's the gospel that helps us live in holy fear. It's the gospel that causes us to treasure Christ above everything else. Are you making this world your home? Are comfort and security in this life a treasure to you? It's a treasure that will fail, that's perishable - look to God's grace in the gospel and you'll see the true treasure of Christ. *Idolatry...*

Church, my longing for my own life and for us as a community is that we would fear God - that we'd respond to all of who he is with all that we are. That we'd live as exiles - not conforming and not withdrawing, but living holy lives for the good of those around us.