

Good evening. That kind of day, huh? Well, I am glad you're here. I know Andrew and Ben already welcomed you, but if you're new here I just want to say, "Hello." My name is Beau. I'm one of the pastors alongside Andrew and Ben and the rest of our church. We are very thankful you're with us tonight, especially if this is your first time to be here. We pray and trust you'll be encouraged whether you're a Christian or not. We're so thankful you're with us.

You actually came on a good night because we are actually as a church starting a new series. We're going to be walking through and studying a letter which is a couple thousand of years old called 1 Peter. It's in the Bible, so if you have a Bible, why don't you take it and turn to 1 Peter? It is in the New Testament, and it's pretty far to the right after the letters Paul wrote, after the big, long letter to the Hebrews. Keep going a bit and you'll find 1 Peter, and we'll get there.

We're going to take the next four weeks to just study through this as a campus. I'm excited and hope you are as well. I do want to remind you that Ben who talked to you earlier and Nicole and Ryan have been leading us in music all day and have done such a fabulous job. John Warren, our worship pastor, is gone for the month, so I just want to remind you about that.

He's actually on sabbatical. If you don't know what a sabbatical is, it is a time churches have given their pastors to sort of pull away from the daily grind of pastoral ministry to refresh and sort of be reinvigorated in their vision and in the work. Our church has given John a month, so that's where he is. Just pray for him and Natalee and their girls as they are brought to your mind by the Holy Spirit in the days ahead.

Also, Matt's going to be gone for the next four weeks. He's not on sabbatical; he's just out of the pulpit, so you have me. I'm sorry, or I'm glad, wherever you're at. Here we go. We're going to take our time and study Peter and what he wrote, at least in the first letter he wrote that we have. I hope it's going to be fruitful. I pray it will be.

If you're looking at Peter, you may have already noticed there are five chapters, so we have four weeks to cover five chapters. We're actually only going to do 13 verses tonight. That means we're going to have three weeks to cover four and a half chapters. Some of you are already doing the math thinking, "That's not going to happen." We'll see. I trust it will happen.

What I'm going to spend the majority of our time tonight doing before we even get into Peter... We'll get into the letter in about 30 minutes. Some of you just closed your Bible and you're like, "Okay. We'll just wait." We'll get there. I promise. What I want to spend the majority of the time doing tonight is sort of setting anchor for these next four weeks by talking about and considering why this letter Peter wrote 2,000 years ago is so very relevant for us today.

All of Scripture is relevant. It doesn't need me or anybody to make it relevant, but I think there are certain things we can think about that help clarify and even crystallize in our minds and in our hearts the themes and the purpose and even the intention of the book and how it applies in our lives as Christians today so far removed from the culture and the context of the actual letter. Does that make sense?

Tonight I'm just going to belabor the point. I'm just warning you. We're going to talk about culture. Hopefully, it won't be boring. My warning is not, "Hey! Be ready to fall asleep." It's more, "Hey! Just be ready to work a little bit as you're listening." We're going to talk about culture. I'm going to have some quotes up here for you to think through.

You're going to have to actually follow a thesis I'm arguing through the sermon before we get to the letter that will then, hopefully, lead us to this moment where you are left thinking, "So what do we do?" I'm so glad you asked. That's why 1 Peter was written. That's the romantic picture of what is going to happen tonight in my mind. It probably won't go that way, but maybe it will. Let's pray the Holy Spirit of God, if nothing else, will just speak to us. I know we've already prayed that and even sang that now, but let's pray to that end.

Father, we are so thankful for your Word, that you in your sovereignty have decided to leave us these Scriptures for our benefit, that we're not left to ourselves. We're not left to our own thoughts. We're not left in the darkness. Your Word enlightens us. It tells us what to think and what's right and what's beautiful. Tonight, would you open the eyes of our hearts, O God, and would you help us to see wonderful things from your Law, from your Word? We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's think a bit just about our culture here in America in Denton, Texas in 2013. I don't know if you know this. I don't know how much you are up to date with culture, with current events. If you're not up to date, maybe tonight will be helpful. Maybe it will just overwhelm you, but virtually, every cultural commentator agrees we are as a nation in the midst of a massive cultural shift.

Some of the commentators are excited about that shift, some of them are lamenting that shift, but all of them agree we are right in the middle of a shift. In fact, some even have gone so far to call the varying

aspects of this cultural shift *seismic* in scope, especially as it pertains to the common opinion about moral issues. It's not just we're in the middle of a cultural shift, but morally even more specifically, there is this shift happening very, very quickly in our culture, and we're right in the middle of it.

In some ways there's nothing new about this shift. It's simply a continuation of something that began a long, long time ago in a little garden called Eden, and even more so recently in a little shift in our culture in the 1960s that went by different titles under the heading *revolution*. Every cultural commentator agrees we're in the middle of a shift.

As Christians... For those of us who are Christians (I know all of you are not) who have spiritual lenses and have our senses trained spiritually this is immediately obvious to us. It should be. Whether you're reading current events or culture or not, it should not be a surprise to you we're in the middle of a shift. When I say that, you should go, "Yeah."

All you have to know is to think about even morally we're in the middle of something when what our culture is doing is taking what has historically been practiced in the dark and called *shameful*, we've now taken those things into the light and we're affirming them as good as a culture. Even now, beyond affirming those things as good and dragging them into the light, we're actually dragging them into the courtroom and wanting to codify them as law.

All you have to do is look at that reality and then you know, "Sure. We're absolutely in the middle of a cultural shift." The reason why I'm so excited about these four weeks we have together is, hopefully, because what we'll talk about will prepare us as a family to move into and through this new cultural landscape faithfully as Christians, holding fast to what we believe to the glory of God.

Let me just give you an illustration that maybe will help you think through that a little bit. If you were moving to a different country, a different culture... Think about the Dolans here in our church. Some of you know the Dolans. They're members here. They have three little girls. They're about to move to Guatemala to be missionaries.

As they're moving, they are preparing as a family for that move, because it's a massive cultural shift. They're leaving America, and they're moving to Guatemala, so they're learning language. Nissi already knows the language, but the rest of them are learning the language. They're learning about the social norms and customs. They're learning about all sorts of things in Guatemala.

Why are they doing that? Because they need to be prepared to move into a new culture, and if they didn't prepare, it could potentially be disastrous for their family. Now it may not be, but if you don't prepare and

you just want to move over to some foreign country without thinking about that and preparing for that, common sense would say, "That's probably not going to go as well as it could if you did prepare." You should prepare, especially if you have three small children you're moving over there. Right? They're preparing for this move.

If you think about culture historically and where we're at in that timeline and if what the commentators are saying is true that we're now moving into a new phase of history in our own culture, essentially what I'm wanting to do is to prepare our church family to move into that culture, to equip us to move. I'm preparing us as a family...

What I'm hoping to do and what I hope God does (not me) through what I'm going to say and what we're going to study these next weeks is to prepare us and equip us to move into a culture. In a lot of ways, what that means is to prepare us and equip us to suffer well and to suffer faithfully in a culture. Let's think about American culture and why that might be so important and why there might be such a "seismic shift" happening right before our eyes in our lives.

Augustine of Hippo, who is a really old guy... He's been dead for a long time now. He was a pastor way back when. He was a theologian. He was a philosopher. He said, when thinking about culture, "If you want to define a people and their culture, if you want to understand a people and their culture, then what you have to find is their loved thing held in common, or in other words, that thing which it is those people love most supremely."

If you want to learn about a culture, if you want to understand a culture, then you go into that culture and you observe what it is these people together love and value most supremely. Os Guinness, who is a cultural commentator, a philosopher, wrote a great book some of you might want to read called *A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future*. What Os Guinness argues sort of in light of what Augustine said is, unquestionably, what Americans love most supremely is freedom.

He writes, "Unquestionably freedom is, and always will be, America's animating principle and chief glory, her most important idea and greatest strength." I think all of us could say, "Yes and amen" to that. The founders of our nation looked at the previous forms of Republicanism, and they founded our country with liberty in mind, and it is amazing to think about how they did that and the structures they created for that.

As we think about freedom, we need to be as Americans thankful for freedom. We need to be excited about freedom. We need to be excited we're not worried tonight people are going to burst into this building and drag us away like they did our brothers and sisters in Libya just a couple of weeks ago because of what we're doing here.

We need to thank God for the soldiers and the politicians and everybody else who sustains our freedom on our behalf. This is a good thing. Indeed, freedom is America's most important idea and greatest strength, but what Guinness argues (and I would agree with him) is at the heart of freedom lies a great paradox. The greatest enemy to freedom is freedom, especially when the idea of what freedom is shifts from something that is thought of in light of the common good.

In other words, my freedom is to be free to be working toward the common good, and it shifts from that to what freedom really is, "I can do whatever I want whenever I want. I'm owed that, and nobody can say anything about it." Especially when you have a shift in definition of freedom, which is what we've had over the years in our country...

The founders when they thought of freedom weren't thinking of what we think of when we think of freedom. We think of this individualized concept of us being able to fulfill all of our desires. That's not what they thought of. When they thought about freedom, they thought about freedom in light of the common good and actually assumed that in people being free, if freedom was ever to work in a democracy, there needed to be the opposite of that personal freedom we think of.

They argued there needed to be self-restraint. They would say unless there is self-restraint, democracy and freedom would fail. What Guinness is saying is when this happens, when the idea of freedom transitions, it begins to undermine itself. It actually has a chronic habit of destroying itself. Here's why. Because unfettered freedom could prove to be the Achilles' heel of the modern world because it dissipates into license.

When you're just free to do whatever you want on the whims of your own desires, that will dissipate naturally into license, triviality, corruption, and a grand undermining of all authority. He says, "But for the moment (our moment even culturally), the world and our culture are still thrilled and enthralled by the great age of freedom."

As you really begin to think about this, think about your life and think about even the subcultures you're a part of even among our larger culture, this is self-evident that, yes, freedom is what we hold most valuable, and not the good kind of freedom, maybe, the founders would have thought of, but the kind of freedom that says, "Man, I have a right to do whatever I want to do whenever I want to do it. If you get in my way, you're getting in the way of my freedom, and that's un-American or un-whatever it is."

That is potentially, and I would even argue, currently disastrous for our country. All you have to do is to think about children to understand why this would be so disastrous and why we are feeling the cosmic shift

we're feeling underneath our feet culturally. Any parent with children knows if you give your child unchecked and unrestrained freedom based on what they want, that's going to be a nightmare for everybody.

Nobody might say it, but if you have a little kid whose parents just say, "Oh! You're two years old. Do you think that's best for you? I'm going to give it to you because you know what's best for you." Nobody wants to be that kid's neighbor, especially when they get older. That kid is going to be a little monster if you just let him do whatever he wants and if you just give him whatever he thinks is best.

No! We don't do that as parents with children. Why? Because adults know better. I even read something this week. It says, "A child assumes all of his or her desires are legitimate. Adults, hopefully, know better." But I would like to submit to you we're now living in a culture where the adults do *not* know better. In fact, the adults are actually fostering and cultivating the worship of this god of freedom among the children of our culture.

Let me just give you one example in the technological world. I don't know if you've heard of Snapchat. Many of you are like, "Yep. I've heard of it. I just did it right now." Great. Proud for you. Let me just read from *Rolling Stone*. I realize there are good ways to use Snapchat. I know that. This is *Rolling Stone's* interpretation of what Snapchat is really going to be used for, or at least most significantly in our culture maybe.

It says, "Snapchat, if you don't know what it is, is the mind-boggling, simple idea of a texting service for photos and videos that makes the item disappear in 10 seconds or less. By faith, the company promises it does not store or keep photographs. In other words, sexting has never been so safe." That's *Rolling Stone's* interpretation of why this is a big deal culturally.

This is what the owner or inventor says. "Facebook..." So if you're on this, apparently you're old school. "Facebook was born out of the 2006/2007 euphoria where people had things to brag about like, 'Hey! Check out my car.' Now our culture is interested in saying, 'This is who I really am,' and apparently who we really are is naked pictures of ourselves we send to people that we want to disappear really quickly." It's unbelievable that's in that magazine. I don't even have to interpret it. That's what it says.

What you're seeing here is instead of the adults of culture pulling the children aside and saying, "Hey, listen. It's probably not a great idea, even though I know you feel like you love this person or you like this person or it's going to be a good thing for you to send an inappropriate picture of yourself to somebody, you probably shouldn't do that."

Instead of the adults doing that, the adults are saying, "Oh! We'll create some technology to make that easier for you to do, so you can actually do that with more uninhibited abandon." We're creating technology to actually free up our culture and even the young generation of our culture to worship this god of freedom even though they have no idea what's best for them.

Not only are we now creating technologies to worship the god of freedom, we're creating laws to worship the god of freedom, which is an immensely more significant thing, especially for those of us who are Christians, because when you begin to take a view or a vision of morality or religion... In secularism it's a religion. It's a worldview. It's a vision of what is morally right and morally wrong (we'll get into that).

When you begin to take a view of morality or religion and you begin to codify it into law, what will necessarily follow that is the imposition of that new religion and that new morality that has been made into law on other people. That always happens. The persecuted often become the persecutors. Do you know what the shining, horrible, sickening example of this is? The best one I think? The church.

Our culture is just stealing a page from the church's history, a page of our history that's really a black eye on us where the church... Even the churches we're going to read about tonight that Peter wrote to were marginalized. They were alienated. They were the minority in culture. They were the persecuted, but slowly and surely, they came into power in the Roman world. Once they got into power, they began to institute and codify aspects of the Christian religion into law because they thought that was a good idea. Then they began to impose that law on other people.

We did that. Christians did that. We thought it was a good idea. "Let's establish a Christian nation," as if you could do that. We codified our religion into the law, and anybody who went contrary to our religion, we persecuted. We burned them at the stake. We did all sorts of horrible things. The church... Non-Christian, if you're here I hope you hear this. The church is the one that is actually a shining, horrible example of this.

This happens anytime you take any religion and try to codify it into law. This is where it's leading, and indeed in our culture, it's where it's leading today. Most clearly, I think, can we see this example before us (actually, before the Supreme Court as well) around the issue of freedom and sexuality with gay marriage and transgender issues being the tip of the spear.

I'll just say this. This is not a sermon about gay marriage. This is not a sermon about transgender issues. If you're a homosexual here tonight or if you, perhaps, are here and you historically or currently have dealt with same-sex attraction or transgender identity issues, I just want to tell you I'm so thankful you're here. Honestly, I don't know why you're here because the church has just treated you so poorly over the years,

but I'm thankful you were brave enough to even be in here tonight. I'd love to meet you. I'd love to hear about your story.

Maybe even just on behalf of the church I just want to apologize for the way in which we've just done such a poor job of loving you and speaking the truth to you in love. Honestly, it's because a lot of us in the church don't know what to do. We don't know how to speak to you. We don't know how to love you. I just want to ask for your forgiveness and tell you I'm so thankful you're here. I really am thankful you're here.

At the same time, I want you to know (and if you've been here any time at all) you know as Christians we believe Jesus Christ is Lord of everything. He's Lord of all things including our sexuality. Jesus actually created us, and he created us and designed us in every way including sexually to live in a way where we and others around us would flourish. That goes in line with his design, and we do believe homosexuality goes against God's design.

The Bible says that. Jesus says that very clearly. He didn't create us to be attracted to the same sex. He didn't create us to live a homosexual lifestyle, so therefore, that is sin, but it's a sin right alongside every other sin. It's not a worse sin. You're not the chief of sinners. I'm the chief of sinners, so pull up a seat. You'll fit in with us here. Okay?

I do want you to know we do believe that, and we'd love to talk with you about that. I realize some of you will disagree with us, and that's okay. Hopefully, we can disagree in a loving way and in a compassionate way, but I do want you to know your sin is just like every other sin in the Bible, which is why it's sandwiched in all these lists we see in the Scripture.

Your sin, your struggle is no worse than my struggle with anger, and at the same time, gay people are called to follow Jesus in the same way every other person is called to follow Jesus, which is by repenting of your sins and doing what he says. Nobody gets to follow Jesus in a different way, even though me of all people, I wish I could do what I wanted to do sometimes.

I'm thankful you're here, and I hope even as we talk about some of these issues it won't heap condemnation on you, especially those of you who are Christians and you're actually fighting against these things you've been convicted are not God's design. We love you, and we thank God for you and have been praying for you all week.

The point I'm making here is this imposition of religion is seen really clearly around the issue of sexuality, so I actually feel I would pastorally be a coward to not pick this topic, because it's the most readily relevant

topic. There are two cases about gay marriage before the Supreme Court. I don't know if you knew that. I hope you did.

This is immediately relevant for us, and around this issue what you see as the culture has begun to affirm their view of gay marriage, whether it's moral or right, and begun to want to have it codified into law, anybody who disagrees with the culture's dominant view is being alienated, is being in some ways persecuted (not physically but socially).

Maybe never was this clearer than in this recent presidential inauguration. I don't know if you paid attention. There was more going on than Beyonce lip-syncing the national anthem, although she did do that and felt the need at the Super Bowl to prove she could sing it without lip-syncing (but that's neither here nor there...sorry).

There was something else going on at the inauguration and that was that President Obama actually hand-picked an evangelical pastor named Louie Giglio from Atlanta to pray at the inauguration. He hand-picked him because he was inspired by the way Giglio had led his followers to work against the evil of sex slavery and sex trafficking around the world.

He's raised millions of dollars. He's led people into incredible amounts of good work in that area, so Obama was inspired to ask him to pray at the inauguration. As soon as he asked him to pray, a firestorm culturally happened, because what was discovered was that Louie Giglio about 20 years ago did what I just did. In one of his sermons from the Bible, he gave the historic, 2000-year-old, Christian position on homosexuality.

He said it was a sin, and he said it was wrong. These people who disagreed with him in the culture heard that, and they began to demand he not pray at the inauguration. It built, and it built, and it built until, finally, Louie Giglio said, "Listen. This is the president's day. I'm not going to bring my circus of accusations and of drama into this day. I'm just going to graciously back out," and he did. The president picked someone else, and he had someone else pray.

What does this moment teach us? Russell Moore, who is a great thinker and theologian today, said, "...by the standards of this controversy [over Giglio praying; it's not just Christians], no Muslim imam or Orthodox Jewish rabbi alive can pray at a presidential inauguration. When it is now impossible for one who holds to the catholic Christian view of marriage and the gospel to pray at a public event, we now have a de facto established state church...the new state church requires a 'license' of embracing sexual liberation in all its forms."

Do you see what's happening? It's not a neutral argument morally. Let me give you another one. I don't know if you knew about this. In Massachusetts, the Catholic church who has been practicing orphan care before there were orphanages or orphan organizations, because that's part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian, that we take care of the orphans and the widows in light of how God has taken care of us through his Son's death and resurrection.

They've been doing this for a long time. When they refused on their biblical principle on what they thought to be their biblical authority to place orphans into same-sex households, the state took away their money and said, "Fine. We're not going to fund you anymore." If you just think about the sheer implications of that, it doesn't matter if that's best for the orphans. It doesn't matter what the Catholic church believes or why they believe it or how long they've believed it.

All that matters is, "You disagree with our new religion, our new morality, and because you do, we're not going to give you any money anymore, and it doesn't really matter what happens to those orphans." That may be overstating it a little bit, but that's what's happening. Even this last week, just moving away from sort of gay marriage and homosexuality and moving into transgender issues, listen to this. This is from *The Huffington Post*. Some of you, as I look around, read that. I can tell. You have your man tanks on and everything. (Sorry. That was totally categorical. It was wrong of me, but true. Very true. I'm sorry. It's been a long day.)

This was the headline in *The Huffington Post* this week. "There is good news for in Massachusetts-based transgender students and their parents. Last week, the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education mandated..." Not my word; their word. "...that transgender students be allowed to use bathrooms and play on the sports teams that coincide with their gender identification..."

In other words, it doesn't matter whether this boy or this girl is anatomically a boy or a girl in the way that historically and physically and physiologically we have decided that is decided. What they think they are, that's where they need to go to the bathroom, even if it means they're going to the bathroom next to people who are anatomically, really, the sex that bathroom is. Mandated.

It says, "These students..." Here's the reason. "These students, because of widespread misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about their lives [which is true] are at a higher risk for peer ostracism, victimization, and bullying..." That's true, and that's horrible. As Christians and as the church, we should be the first ones to step up and say, "That's horrible, and that's not okay. It's not okay for people, even though we think what they do is way different than how we see the world, to be ostracized and victimized and bullied."

We should be the first ones as Christians standing up and saying, "That is unjust. That is not okay." The reason we don't do that is often the reason why we lose our voice so much in culture. Because we just want to talk about the problem and not be part of the solution. That's wrong, but what is just as wrong is the way they're dealing with that issue.

Instead of saying what I just said or something akin to that in culture, what they're saying is, "Fine. We'll do this. We'll let little boys and girls go into whatever bathroom and be on whatever team they think they should be on even if 'Some students may feel uncomfortable sharing those facilities, but this discomfort is not a reason to deny access to the transgender student.'"

Do you hear what just happened here? What *these* little kids experience in victimization and bullying, that is a trump card over what *these* little kids experience when they feel uncomfortable for these kids coming into their bathroom when they're anatomically different. It doesn't matter. This one matters more than this one, so therefore, we're going to mandate on you that this happens.

I could give more and more and more and more examples, but we are living in a culture that is imposing its religion on us. What that means for you and me as Christians is we're going to be persecuted in the days ahead. Not physically. Not like our brothers and sisters in Libya or Iran, so I don't want to overplay this at all. We shouldn't, but socially, politically (not Democrat/Republican politically) in terms of just life, community, and city, this is coming for us.

These examples? There's nothing really new about this, so we don't need to be afraid as Christians. We don't need to be surprised. Every culture in the world is fallen, and it always has been since Genesis 3. This is, in one sense, nothing new. Our culture (we could go on and have a doomsday approach about how bad it is), every culture is bad. Every culture is a conspiracy of unbelief, because every culture is under the reign of the Evil One.

That's what the Bible says. Even though Jesus is over all things, for this season for whatever reason in God's sovereignty, Satan is now ruling and reigning as the prince of the power of the air, and we all, even if we're Christians, still live under that authority enslaved to him until Jesus rescued us. It shouldn't surprise us, because cultures are evil.

At the same time, even though cultures (every one of them for all time) have fallen, there is common grace in every culture. God has not abandoned culture, and we're not to abandon culture as Christians and say, "Oh, my God! It's so dark. Let's go be Amish," or "Let's go be monks," or "Let's just sort of pull out and be bigots and look down our noses and be condescending and throw rocks and huddle up together."

That's not what we do. We're to live *in* the world and not of it, because we know, even though culture has fallen, there is common grace in every single culture. God is there working and saving and transforming and redeeming and recreating. He's doing it through his people (you and me). That's why we're called to do justice and be about good works and to love our neighbor more than we love ourselves and on and on and on and all these things Peter is going to talk about as we get into this letter.

Every culture is fallen. This isn't new. It shouldn't surprise us. If it does surprise you and if you do get all fearful, just look at history or, rather, just come the next few weeks as we read through 1 Peter, and you'll realize we are in good company and there are answers to how we should live in the middle of this. What is new is this moment we're in where, again, our culture is drawing out of the dark what used to be shameful, calling it good, affirming it, bringing it into the law, and saying, "If you don't affirm it with us, we're going to ostracize you."

Friends, make no mistake. This is not a neutral argument. These cases that are before the Supreme Court are not morally neutral, no matter what people would have you to believe. Even non-Christians are saying this. I don't know if you've ever heard of Michael Sandel. He is the foremost (maybe the most) celebrated professor in our nation today. He's a political philosophy teacher at Harvard.

His classes have to turn away. When I heard that and saw it on YouTube, I thought, "I don't even have a framework for that. A class that everybody wants to get into, a 1,400-seat auditorium where they're turning away people? That guy is a rock star professor." He really is. His big argument, his big critique of liberal neutrality is no one passes judgment on what's right and what's wrong and what's just apart from morality.

Even if you're a non-Christian... He's saying it's naïve. He's not a Christian and he's saying, "It's naïve to think it is." He says, "Justice is inescapably judgmental. Whether we're arguing about financial bailouts or...surrogate motherhood or same-sex marriage, affirmative action [which is also before the Supreme Court] or military service CEO pay...questions of justice are bound up with competing notions of honor and virtue [i.e. morality], pride and recognition. Justice is not only about the right way to distribute things. It is also about the right way to value things."

Listen, friends. Our culture's values are on the table. Their cards are on the table. They're not hiding it, and they contradict, in many ways, ours, because at the root of them a lot of the time is this god of freedom everyone is bowing down to and being asked to bow down to. Let me tell you why this is significant for us in Denton. In Denton, Texas, we're in the middle of a college town.

Surely, you know (at least if you've thought about it anytime) as the college campuses go, so goes the culture in so many ways. The professors of our nation (Sandel included and I'm thankful for that one) in so

many ways along with the judges and other elites are the pastors of our country. Every day they're right across the street or right down the street, and they're making disciples they're sending into the world to transform it.

That's what they're doing, whether they use that language or not, which they don't. That's what's happening. In Denton, this is not some theoretical conversation about, "This is happening in culture, and we're going to have to learn how to be Christians..." This is in your life every day, for those of you who are students and those of you who are professors.

This isn't theoretical. We're right here on the front lines of this culture, so we need help. We need to know how to think about these things. We need to know how to be Christians. Here's my angst. As Christians, dear church, we *cannot* just be swept downstream with the culture. You do realize you're going to have to make a stand, and unless things change in a significant way, it's not going to be a popular one you make.

My angst for us pastorally is, "Are we going to be equipped and ready to make that stand, or are we going to punt our faith when our moment comes, when the heat is turned up on us? Are we going to give up on Jesus when it's no longer socially acceptable to follow him?" That's my angst. In the days ahead, we're going to be forced (in a weird way I'm very thankful) publicly to count the cost more than we ever have. Do you know what's going to be awesome about that?

You're going to see, Lord willing, a lot of purification in the church. You're going to see a lot of chaff thrown up in the air and just blown about by the winds of culture. It will be revealed what our faith is really like. Don't you know we, who have a God and a religion and a view of the world that completely contradicts the god and the religion and the view of the world that is now being in many ways imposed on us...?

Don't you know that's going to create conflict? Do you not think those little kids who have been in Kids' Village all day the world they're going to grow up in is going to be...? Can you imagine? I think about my own kids. They're going to grow up in a way you and I never had to. It's cute to bring them in here on Sundays and sing their songs and do the hand motions.

We need to do that, and we'll do it some more, but we also need to start praying for the next generation and praying how God might use us to help equip them even as we are equipped to live faithfully together. Listen, church. As this comes and as we move into this as a family and as we transition into this culture, I'm looking around the room. I love you. So many of you I know. I pray for you by name. I know your story. I've watched your baptism.

I don't want one of you to fall away from the faith. I want you to stand firm and persevere in your faith in the midst of hardship. When you're at that job interview and they ask you about what you believe personally, I want you to tell them with courage and boldness and graciousness. When your professor continues to belittle you and what you believe day after day after day after day, I want you to stand firm, even if it means you don't do well in the class. I want you to stand firm.

When your neighbor or your co-worker confronts you about what you believe, I want you to give an answer. I live on Egan Street for the time being, which is just right down the street here. Right when we moved in we were just still meeting the neighbors, and my wife was out probably chasing my son around. One of the neighbors came up to her and somehow she had heard I was your pastor.

"Oh, your husband pastors a church that meets up there on Oak Street?"

"Yeah."

"So you guys believe gay marriage and homosexuality are a sin?"

"Yeah." *My name is Kimberly. My favorite color is blue.* When that moment comes, I want us to be able to give an account winsomely and boldly and humbly. It is coming. I think about those of you who have children. When the parents of the kids who your child hangs out with come to you and ask you why you won't allow your child to be a part of the same activities and beliefs their child is a part of, I want you to give an answer.

I don't want you to punt your faith. When your family kicks you out of the house because you believe something differently, as someone came up and told me this morning, I want you to hold steady. I want you to hold the line. I want myself to hold the line. Peter is going to say it this way. He's going to say, "I don't want you to just stand; I want you to actually boldly and winsomely give an account."

1 Peter 3... You don't have to write this down. We're almost to 1 Peter. Okay? Stay with me and the sermon will start. Some of you just get up and leave. Peter says, "**But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.**" This is what Peter's going to say. "**Have no fear of them...**" Isn't it amazing we are afraid? Have you ever noticed the people who disagree with you about what you believe are not near as afraid to tell you as you are to tell them?

That neighbor who confronted my wife? She wasn't worried about my wife's sensibilities. She just told her what she thought. Yet, as Christians, we're just so meek. Meek is even the wrong word. We're just so afraid to say what we really believe. Peter says, "Don't have any fear. Don't be troubled." "**...but in your hearts**

honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

That's why we're studying this letter together, so you and I would be equipped to do that in the midst of this culture. That exactly is what this letter is about. Now that you know that and you have a sense of why this is important (maybe more important than you thought), let's look at 1 Peter. We're just going to go through the first 13 verses. Stay with me, because this gets beautiful really quickly, and it gets really helpful really quickly.

I think it's helpful for you to know Peter was (I don't know if you knew this) crucified upside down because he was a Christian and he didn't recant his faith in Jesus. When he writes about these things... It's really easy to go, "Oh, that guy doesn't know my story. You don't know my life. Great. You haven't been crucified upside down." He has because he loved Jesus, so when he writes this letter, let that be to you a sense of weightiness about what he's saying and his sense of authority, that he has the right to say these things.

It isn't just something he wrote about and then he went off to his house in the hills and just relaxed while the Christians suffered. He wrote about it, and then he went to Rome and let them crucify him upside down because he didn't think he was worthy to be crucified like Jesus, so he said, "Turn me upside down." That's legit.

He's also a man who had his life completely transformed by Jesus Christ. We talk about Peter's failures all the time and we point him out as the idiot one who always speaks up. He's just like me and you. Through Jesus extending again and again his grace and teaching him what it means to follow him, Peter's life was transformed.

He's not this foolish idiot any more than you and I (I should say, I guess). He was one who boldly proclaimed the gospel, because Jesus changed him. He spent more time with Jesus arguably than anybody else. Jesus poured into him. Jesus taught him. Even though he's not going to quote Jesus per se a lot in this letter, everything he's saying is really just regurgitating what Jesus taught him.

You can hear the echoes of Jesus Christ's teaching all the way through this letter, and that's beautiful. He's writing this letter to a group of Christians just like you and me in a culture very similar to ours where they were being persecuted for their faith. They were the minority group in the culture. They were alienated from the people because the people believed in all these other gods and not the Christian God. They thought, "These Christians are weird. They're foolish."

That's why the letter says it is foolishness to the Greeks. They just thought the Christians were a bunch of backwoods idiots for believing what they believed, so they were persecuted, not by the state in a real formal way. At least not here. That would happen at other points in history, but here they're just being persecuted by their friends and their neighbors and their co-workers and their family members because of what they believed.

Into this culture, like ours in many ways, Peter writes this letter. He says, "**Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...**" That's modern-day Turkey. I know you knew that, but I just wanted to tell you. "**...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ...**" It's a great Trinitarian sentence there. "**...and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.**" That's quite the welcome. We don't write letters like that any more.

If you have a pen, go ahead and circle those two words that are together in verse 1: *elect exiles*. It might read something like *resident aliens* in your version depending on what version you have, but those two words are words that mean different things right next to each other. It's an oxymoron. You are elect exiles. My seminary professor actually says you could argue the entire theme of the letter is found in those two words: *elect exiles*.

This is what Peter is going to come back to over and over and over again and hold these words to your attention. A great synonym he gave us for what this means today is *refugee millionaires*. That's what he calls this church in the midst of this culture. "You're like refugee millionaires." Here's what that means. "You are at the same time the most despised and looked down upon in all of the world and yet the richest and most blessed in Jesus Christ of anybody on the face of the planet."

You are refugees. This is not your home, so don't act like it's your home. You're exiles. You're aliens here. Don't act like this is your permanent residence. Don't act like the things the world puts its hope in are what you put your hope in. Don't live like that. Even though you're rejected here, you belong somewhere, and God (as we're about to find out) is moving you toward where you belong.

We are exiles. We are elect exiles. We are resident aliens, the most persecuted perhaps but the most blessed in all of the world. Not just us. All Christians everywhere. This is a great identity for who we are as Christians. What does he say to these elect exiles? This is what he says in verse 3. Before we read that, just think about this.

I know it's a letter. These people are struggling. They're discouraged. They're tired. They're being persecuted. Their friends are being persecuted. They've given up a lot to follow Jesus, more than most of

us ever will. Can you imagine? They finally get a letter in the mail from Peter. "The apostle wrote us a letter!" The mailman brings it by. "Oh, my gosh! We have to get the church together. Let's read this letter!" They would be excited. You would be excited. I would be excited.

"What's he going to say? How's he going to help us to endure and to persevere through all of this?" This is what he says. This is how he starts his letter. They rip it open, and they read it. It says, "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**" He worships. He says, "**According to [God's] great mercy, he has caused us to be born again...**"

God has saved us. He's made us alive in Christ. He's awakened us from our spiritual deadness. He's regenerated us. Whatever word you want to use... "**...he has caused us to be born again...**" Okay. Born again to what? "**...to a living hope...**" We're those who have been woken up from our deadness, and we have a hope now because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

If you're not a Christian, I feel like it's somewhat helpful to know as Christians our faith is rooted in the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a verifiable event many eyewitnesses in the first century verified. We're not Christians because the way it makes us feel when we come in here and sing songs. That's a bonus.

Almost every time we have sung tonight I've just been overwhelmed with emotion. That's not what makes me a Christian. That's not why I'm a Christian. That's not a good foundation for your Christianity. The foundation for our Christianity is that Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God who came and lived and died and rose from the dead by the power of God.

That's what Peter is saying here. "You've been born again through Jesus, and because he was resurrected from the dead, he's given you a living hope." Not only that, look at verse 4. "**...an inheritance that is imperishable...**" It's different than any inheritance you could hope for here in this world. You hear Jesus here saying, "Don't store up for yourselves treasure on earth, because they're perishable, because moth and rust can destroy them."

He's saying the inheritance God has given you is "**...imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...**" by God. He's saying, "While your enemies and those persecuting you can take away anything from you on earth, they cannot take away this inheritance. They cannot take away this hope. They cannot take away this salvation," because God is in heaven guarding it. He's in heaven keeping it for you.

Let them take whatever they want to take in this world, because they can't take that because God is keeping it. That's unbelievable to know, as you're moving through persecution, God is keeping this for you

in heaven. Not only that, he's caused you to be born again. He's keeping this inheritance for you. **"...who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed..."** Not only is he keeping our inheritance, but God himself is guarding us.

The picture here is like a platoon of Navy Seals taking a civilian through the enemy lines finding and working their way to the embassy, finally where there could be rest and protection and a fortress forevermore. You've seen those movies. None of them are realistic. It's like *Taken 2* with the 13-year-old girl driving through the city. It's like, "She doesn't even know how to drive," but somehow she makes her way through the city, and her daddy is protecting her.

"We're going to make the embassy," and then they just crash the car into the embassy, and everything is better, and it goes to the next scene. That's the real deal for Christians, though. This is a real battlefield, and God is not only keeping our salvation and our inheritance, but he is guarding that in us. Our Father is walking beside us. That's amazing what he says in verses 3 through 5.

Why does he start the letter that way? Why didn't he start by saying, "I've heard you're struggling and suffering and I want to speak to that"? That's not what he does. He starts with this. Why? There's a commentator named Jeff Dryden, and he argues the reason he does this is because Peter's primary intention in writing this letter is to build character in his hearers.

What Dryden argues is Peter knows, like many have known throughout the ages, the way you form character in people is by giving them a narrative vision of life. In other words, if you put something beautiful in front of them, if you put a beautiful vision and a beautiful promise in front of someone, that transforms people and builds character in them and will compel them to persevere.

He's saying Peter knows this, so he doesn't start off with moral regulations. He doesn't start off with anything. He starts off with the most beautiful, rich, hope-filled vision of salvation and the gospel imaginable, because he knows this is what the people need. That's what's going to transform them. That's what's going to sustain them.

It's not going to be him saying, "You need to do this. Don't do this." It's going to be them saying, "God has done this to us, and this is what's waiting for us." We know this. This is what we do in all of life. Right? If you have a young violinist and you want her to be great, the first thing you do is not sit her down and say, "Let me tell you about the rules of music. Let me tell you about the right way to pluck the strings. Let me tell you about this reality and this reality."

No. What you do is you take her to a concert where there is a great violinist playing, and you say, "That's greatness. Listen to that. Look at that. Do you know what? That's where you may be headed." When she goes back to her chair and she starts practicing, she has that vision of beauty that has stunned her and captivated her and inspired her to help her persevere through those days when her fingers hurt because she's been plucking on those strings so long (or whatever they do on the violin).

That's how you create character. That's how you help people to persevere and to move toward the goal. You put beauty in front of them. That's why some of you are not transformed, because you're still thinking Christianity is all about following the rules. You've been following the rules for a long time. You've been trying to follow the moral regulations, and it doesn't change you.

Beauty changes you, and because your heart has not been stunned and captivated by what's in verses 3 through 5, you've not been transformed. You're just white-knuckling it. Moral regulations? All they do, spiritually speaking, is either create rebels or whitewashed tombs who think they're better than everybody else. Beauty transforms, and Peter knows this, so he doesn't first give the church something to do. He first gives the church a vision of who God is and what he's done and is doing and intends for it to change them.

Do you know what really drove this home for me this week? Listening to Justin Timberlake's new CD. Oh, please. Some of you are like, "Yeah. On the way in I was..." I like to keep up with culture, and I may or may not like the G-rated songs on the CD, but there's a song on the CD I really do like. It's called "Tunnel Vision." Some people are laughing. "Yeah! That's my jam! I like that one."

It's called "Tunnel Vision." It's JT. He's talking about, "I'm in a club. There's like a million girls." Timberlake has his beats going. Basically, what he's saying is, "There are a million girls here in the club." It's really romantic. Strive for that, ladies. This is what you want to hear. He's saying, "But all I see is you." He's saying, "I have tunnel vision. This is all I see."

This is what the song actually says. It says, "I look around and everything I see is beautiful 'cause all I see is you. And I can't deny it, and I stand by it, and I won't hide it anymore." He's captivated by this vision of this sweet, godly woman he's looking at. Listen. Don't go getting your theology from Justin Timberlake, but based on what we're saying, that's good theology.

That's what Peter is saying. Do you want to persevere? The only thing that will help you persevere is the vision of verses 3 through 5. That's the only thing that will make it. It just begs to question, "Is that vision of that gospel, of that salvation, where you're putting your hope?" What is the vision that's compelling your life? Is it the vision of this salvation and this gospel, or is it the American vision, the American dream?

Is it an educational vision? An educational salvation? A social salvation? A familial salvation? A political? A financial? What's the vision that is dominating your heart, and because it's so dominating your heart, it's dominating every part of your life? Are you just your vision? Finding you, as if that's going to transform or help anybody? What's your vision?

The gospel is the only one that will sustain us, family, in the days ahead, and that's why he says in verse 6, **"In this [salvation, inheritance] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor..."**

"Well done, good and faithful servant." **"...at the revelation of Jesus Christ."** If this is what we're rejoicing in, he says, **"Though you have not seen him, you love him."** Because he is what we're hoping for and hoping in. He says, **"Though you do not now see him, you believe in him."** Will we believe in him in the days ahead? Will we **"...rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of [our] faith, the salvation of [our] souls"**?

Then he goes on in verses 10 through 12 saying, "Listen. This vision, this salvation the prophets in the Old Testament wanted to see it. They enquired as to when it was going to happen and who it was going to happen through, but they realized they weren't hearing and perceiving these things for themselves. **"...but [for] you..."** He ends by saying in verse 12, "Even the holy angels are jealous this has been revealed and experienced by us."

Indeed, we're a rich people that even the angels would look in on our gathering tonight and be jealous. In verse 13 he ends, and this is where we'll stop tonight. He says, **"Therefore..."** Because of this, church, because of what he just said, **"...preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you [and to me] at the revelation of Jesus Christ."**

Father, we pray in light of everything we've talked about tonight you would help us do that. Honestly, Lord, we just repent that our hope has been in the same things the world's hope is in, in so many ways: things that are fading, things that are perishable, things that are defiled. That's where we've put our hope instead of the inheritance you've promised us through Jesus Christ, namely to be with him and see him forever.

God, would you help us and equip us in the days ahead as we study this letter to be faithful as your people, to stand firm, and to be loving and gracious all the while? We pray in Jesus' name, amen.