

Good morning, guys. Y'all look good. My name is Matt Younger. I am one of the pastors here. I get the privilege today to finish out our 1 Peter series, which has been a local series. Steve jumped to chapter 5 last week, and I get to bring it home with chapter 2 today. If that tells you any way about how our campus works, that will make sense. I get to really preach on a spectacular passage, 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 9 through 12. Let's go there. I invite you to open your Bible and go to 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 9.

**"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."**

I've always been fascinated by history. I mean, *always*, even as a really young, kind of nerdy kid. My mom would put down presidential placemats (you guys might remember them) with the presidents on one side and the countries and the capitals. I would memorize those. If I'm honest, a day at the Smithsonian for me may be like a day at the beach for some of you.

I got to play George Washington in my fifth grade musical. It was the thrill of my life. It still kind of is, if I'm honest. I can still recite the solo I sang. I love history. Some kids like math and science. I was terrible, but I loved history. I love the Civil Rights. I'm just fascinated by that time, and I love this story I'm about to tell you. It starts in Birmingham, which was really the tipping point for the Civil Rights Movement.

Martin Luther King was there obviously as a leading figure. He was leading out in these non-violent protests and boycotts against discrimination laws. He was really leading out. Eight white clergymen responded to King publicly with his antics, they called, in a letter in the newspaper in which they called for unity. Basically what they told him is, "You need to slow down. We understand there are some injustices against you and your people, but you need to slow down. You need to fight this battle in the courts."

King responded from jail. He was thrown in jail for these protests. He responded with "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a now famous letter he wrote, for which he won a Nobel Peace Prize. In that letter he

said very famously, "Justice delayed is justice denied," and that it was high time, with a posture of extreme love, to make the African American grievances known in the public square and fight. That's what he said. The rhetoric was really compelling in his argument, so compelling that I would tell you this is why it's significant.

One of the eight men who wrote the initial letter was a man named Bishop Joseph Durick. He was an auxiliary bishop in Mobile, Alabama. Bishop Joseph Durick. My mom's maiden name is Durick. This was my grandpa's brother. My mom's uncle, my great uncle, Bishop Joe, was one of the original critics of Martin Luther King. I was born Roman Catholic. He was so moved by the argument King made by his rhetoric that he repented from what he believed.

He agreed with King. He marched with King. He visited King in jail. He was friends with him. He was so captivated by King's argument. When my grandpa told me this story when I was a little guy, I was captivated too. I was a little nerdy history kid. I loved everything I read, because really I think... It brought home in my life... It made me feel for the first time like I was living history. I realized from history that I was born into a story much bigger than the story I had known.

I think that's what the apostle Peter is doing here in this text. I think he is doing something similar. He is encouraging the church to see themselves in a story much larger than the one they knew. It would help for me to give you a little bit of context. At the time this letter was written, the tide of Christianity is really flourishing out. It's just spreading out throughout the Greco-Roman world. Christianity is not the sleeping giant yet, but it's becoming the sleeping giant.

The gospel is multiplying out like subdivisions do here in Dallas, just everywhere. Do you know what I'm talking about (these suburbs, these bedroom communities, that go out everywhere and subdivisions)? One day there's a forest. The next day they knock it down. The next day there's a subdivision because it's just going out everywhere. That's what the gospel is doing here. Peter is writing to six cities spread out through Asia Minor. Asia Minor is modern-day Turkey. It's this massive land mass loosely the size of California. Remember they walked everywhere or rode their horses. No cars. You guys know that.

He is not writing to a concentrated area. He is writing really to a smattering of cities throughout the area. They're very diverse. Some towns had the look and feel of Rome. Some were more rural. If I'm honest, some were just straight redneck. They really were. I mean, they were just kind of out there, boondocks, sitting under the shade of the pine trees, if they had that. You had all manner of religions, languages. This was an untamed vast region. It was purely Gentile. That's probably a good way to wrap it up. It was Gentile.

Peter was writing them to encourage them in suffering, because the place of suffering in God's will was confusing to his original audience. The large-scale sufferings we know about in history, the persecutions, hadn't started yet, so Peter is writing this as a primer to say, "Persevere and see the big picture." He is saying there's a kind of suffering coming for you and degrees of hardship that are already here that God intends as a temporary test of faith for you to model the life of Christ in his suffering.

Grow in grace, and whatever you do in your perseverance, it won't negate the inheritance that is yours in Christ. That's shored up. That's what he says in the first chapter. While some people in this letter are starting to feel the affliction, starting to feel the suffering, Peter was priming for its certainty. What's happening to start causing suffering? Just a quick second here. Naturally in their conversion to Christ, they're starting to experience different values, different priorities, and different allegiances.

Christians are being marginalized. They're being alienated from their families. Some are losing social credibility and connections. Some are losing a lot worse than that. It's because of this new belief. Hear me in this. It's not simply that they were holding onto Jesus as a deity. This was the Greco-Roman world. They celebrated a plurality of gods. So you could hold Jesus up as deity compared to anybody else, but the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, that Jesus went into the grave, came out of the grave, is now King with everything subjected under his feet, was a threat.

That was a threat to the Roman Empire as they knew it. Peter is saying, "They're turning on you because of this belief. This belief can and will (and did) turn the world upside down. They're turning on you, and it's going to get worse." His letter provides consolation, it provides encouragement, and it provides guidance in suffering. I think it has a lot to say to us. So here's where I want to drill down. This is what I want to say to you.

Namely this: the staggering reality of God's love for us, the story he has brought us into much larger than we know, teaches us how we avoid the wrong kind of suffering and prepares us for the right kind of suffering. That's what I'm trying to bring home with y'all this morning. Have you ever been just really specifically encouraged by somebody in your past?

There's this guy named John Bryson. He is a friend of this church. He is a pastor dude in Memphis, and he tweeted this a while back. It was so good that he re-tweeted it. We do that with some of our good tweets. If you're not on Twitter, we wait a little bit and then re-tweet them again. This was his quote. "Direct, specific, sincere, verbalized encouragement goes a long, long, long, long, long, long, long, long, long, long way." Then he ran out of 140 characters.

My sophomore year in high school... It was after camp. There was this guy named Tim. We were in Sunday school. We were kind of debriefing from camp. He looked across the circle at me. I was sitting there eating my doughnut, like you did in Sunday school (like /certainly did in Sunday school). He said, "Matt, I want you to know I really see growth in your life. I'm really encouraged by you. I think you're growing as a leader."

He said that publicly, and it was so much a deposit in my life, it meant so much to me then, that I'm here 15 years later telling you that. That really direct, really specific, really sincere encouragement goes a long, long, long, long way. This is precisely what Peter is doing in this first part of the text. He says you're a chosen race. You're a royal priesthood. You're a holy nation. You're a people for his own possession. He is highly intentional in these four descriptions, so intentional that he borrows two stories anybody from the Old Testament schoolyard would know.

Any young Jew with any semblance of Old Testament history (although they wouldn't call it the Old Testament) knows these stories. You're like, "Matt, why does it matter that the New Testament is quoting the Old Testament? It does it all the time." Not like this. It doesn't do it all the time like this. He is drawing in this language from Exodus and from Isaiah two very precise parts in the book in two of the most climactic stories in the Scriptures.

Exodus, where God saves his people from Egypt, and the Babylonian captivity, where Israel blows it, and God says, "I love you, and I'm not through with you yet, because you're a chosen race." I cannot underestimate the significance here. It would not be unlike in the movie *Sandlot* when... By the way, they teach us in seminary that sports analogies never work in preaching, which takes away like 90 percent of my database.

Anyway, if this *Sandlot* analogy doesn't register with you, I would like to apologize on behalf of your neglected childhood. I would like for you to go home and rent this movie, because it's fantastic. It's a great American staple. It's a classic. It's hardly about sports too. It's a coming of age. Anyway, Scotty ("You're killing me, Smalls") is new to baseball, right? They have their baseball money, and they play in the sandlot. They hit the ball out over the fence where the huge dog is and where James Earl Jones lives.

They run out of money, and Scotty, the genius that he is, goes back to his house where he sees a baseball on his stepdad's desk that's autographed by somebody. He says, "Guys, I have a ball." He brings the ball, comes back, and they play with it. They hit it over the monster, and then he goes, "Oh man! I have to bring that ball back to my stepdad. It's signed by somebody. It's signed by Babe Ruth."

They look at him just incredulously. They're like, "Babe? We played with a Babe Ruth baseball?" He is like, "Who is that?" "The colossus of clout! The sultan of swat! The great bambino! You don't know who that is?" He is like, "Oh, that's the same guy?" Every kid on the sandlot knew who Babe Ruth was.

Every young person with any sense of their Jewish history knew these two stories. This is the story Peter is pulling from. He says, "I called them a chosen race. I heard the cries of my children. I saved and delivered them. I spoke the promises to them." Peter is saying in Christ, your true deliverer, these promises are now true of you. He applies the most significant language to these Gentiles. He calls them a chosen race. Then he calls them a royal priesthood. That means royal and priesthood.

If I'm honest with you guys, it's hard for me to wrap my mind around royal imagery. It's just hard for me to get anything royal. Here's why I think that is. We live in the most advanced democracy in human history. Our country was formed as a reaction to a monarch. We've been schooled here under the virtues of representative democracy. We get to elect and can our leaders all the way from like city council to president. If we don't like you, you're done. Get out of there. Your term is over.

Even our best presidents, like FDR, the only president who was elected to three terms and who got us out of the Second World War, even after he served his third term, people were like, "That kind of smells like a monarchy. We need to enact the twenty-second amendment of the Constitution," which they did, which only allowed a president to serve two terms. We like the power. The power is in the people. That's the idea of a democracy.

So anything pertaining to royalty, meaning true royalty (power and authority and subjects and endless wealth and absolute sovereignty) is just hard for me. If I'm honest, the closest I really get to royalty, thinking about royalty, is when I'm in the checkout lane with my wife, Dana, and we see pictures of Kate Middleton, the pregnant princess. She is really cute. You know, cute, pregnant princess. That's on every newspaper thing. She seems pretty cool.

Here's what's really neat when I got to thinking about Kate Middleton. When she was born, her mom and dad were flight attendants. She landed purely in the British middle class, squarely in the British... She was a commoner, just a commoner like us. Her parents became a little more well to do, so she went off to a nice college. When she went to college, she met a prince, who had prince in his blood. He was born into royalty. He'll stay royal. He'll probably be the king one day.

She meets Prince William, and because of his courtship of her, she married into royalty. When she, the common lady, married into royalty, everything that was his became hers, so much so that she is not any different in her royalty now than he is, because she married into it. Her husband is a prince, but ours is a

King. We have married into royalty. We have married into royalty! We are the bride of Christ. Our King is our bridegroom, and everything that is his is ours. We married into it. It's pretty wonderful.

We're not just royal; we're priests. What is Peter saying? What's a priest? The word has some baggage, if I'm honest. It has some baggage. It's often misunderstood, so there's this medieval tendency that divided the spiritual and the secular. The spiritual were those who kind of had access, really, really had access. Then the commoners had *partial* access. The spiritual guys, the priests, were (I'm about to kind of explain what I mean here) the ones who could go before the Lord and really kind of experience the throne. Then everything else had to happen for the commoner, for the lay people, through the priest.

This dude named Martin Luther (not Martin Luther King, but Martin Luther) goes, "No, that isn't right." From this verse and from Revelation 5:9 and 10 (which says you were slain and you made them priests), he made the argument based on 1 Timothy 5 that there is one middleman, one mediator, one person who connects us to God: Jesus Christ. In Christ, we have access before the throne to make sacrifices, to sing God's praises, to delight in God's presence.

There's absolutely no barrier now. Because of Christ, he has made us priests. We are in, we have access to, our Creator. Not only do we have access. It's okay to go in, and he wants us to be there. So we're a royal priesthood. Zechariah (minor prophet, major message) in Zechariah 3 has this vision where Joshua, who is the high priest, is standing in front of an angel of the Lord. Satan is at his right accusing him. Joshua is wearing these filthy garments, and he is defiled.

If we drill down into what he is defiled with, it's excrement. Kids, that's just a fancy word for number two. That's the business. He is defiled with the business. He is nasty, and he can't go before the Lord. He can't do that. He is wearing filthy garments. He is devout. He can't represent. He can't go into God's presence, and he can't plead like a priest does for the people for whom he represents. Satan is pouncing on him. In this vision, Satan is pouncing on him like he does.

He is honing in on that thing, that ugly thing about Zechariah, that thing that tells him he is not worthy, that thing that mars his past, maybe that thing that he did last weekend, whatever it is. He is honing in. He is honing in on that thing that Joshua thinks is keeping God mad at him. Listen to what the Lord does. Listen to what he does to take initiative. He says to Satan, "Rebuke you! Rebuke you, Satan! I have chosen this nasty dude. I have chosen him."

I'm telling you Scripture now. He says, "I have taken his iniquity, and I clothed him with pure vestments." God is saying, "I've chosen him. I've taken the worst of him and given him the best of me, which is all of me. All of me for all for him," because he is anticipating a Great High Priest who would do that very same

thing. So we have access. That's what he is telling them. That's what he is telling us. We have access to come into the Lord's presence, delight in the pleasures of his grace.

God is saying through this, "He is holy as I am, because I have made him holy." This is a segue to the third thing Peter says. He says we are a holy nation. The high priest of Israel, the main dude, would walk into the Holy of Holies once a year, and he had 12 dazzling stones. If you saw them, you would go, "Man, that's sick. That's just blinged out." It was pretty spectacular.

The high priest would walk into the Holy of Holies with 12 dazzling stones. On behalf of Israel, he would go into the most Holy Place. He would put before the Lord in the presence of the Lord the perfect lamb. The Holy One of Israel... He would put that before him as a substitute and as a sacrifice. What this is anticipating as priests is that Jesus, the Great High Priest, goes before us now and sees... The Father sees on the Great High Priest's heart our names engraved.

What he is saying is Jesus has made you holy. He has called you to the holy life of a priest. So you have access. He is saying, "Whatever you think it is that is staining you down on right now, you have access to your Creator. You get to walk in." He keeps going. He calls them **"...a people for his own possession..."** This harkens back to "chosen race." Some people don't like this. If I'm honest, for a long time in my life, I didn't like it either, because I didn't get it.

What does he mean by a "chosen race"? What does he mean by "a people for his own possession"? The first thing I would tell you is that *chosen* does not mean *choice*. *Chosen* and *choice* are not the same thing. *Choice* is what you get when you go to Bob's Steak and Chop House, when you go to Ocean Prime, when you go to The Mansion on Turtle Creek. You go there because something they have is choice. People go there to get that thing.

*Chosen* is not *choice*. It isn't because you're special that God chooses you. He makes that clear to the Israelites in Deuteronomy. He is like, "You're like the lowest and weakest of all of them." Then Paul reinforces that. "God didn't choose you. You're a zero." He says that. That's in the Bible! "You're a zero." There's nothing special about us that ushers in the presence of God to redeem us. He chooses us, not because we're choice but because he chooses us.

There's a really big difference there, and that difference in our lives, because there is nothing inherently special, should kill all elitism, because how could we have pride in something we didn't accomplish. How in the world could we boast in something we did not accomplish? Peter is encouraging his audience here to see themselves as part of a story much bigger than they know. We keep going.

The second part of verse 9 and verse 10 he says, **"...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."** He is saying once you had not received mercy, but now you have. He is saying it's staggering. It is staggering for you to come to realize how much God loves you.

Peter starts this letter with, **"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."** This is precisely why he can say "...out of darkness and into marvelous light," because we've come from death to eternal glory. You see, there's this misconception. I don't know if it's just a southern thing. I think it's an everybody thing, but I certainly see it here.

There's this misconception that you and I have this little bit of heartsickness that Jesus came to heal these little peccadilloes that he blots out with a magic marker. If you were just a little bit better dad or you were a little bit better husband or you weren't so much a gossip or you were a little shrewder with your money, then everything would be okay. He would cut that wicked part out of your heart, and then you would be basically good.

The problem with that is when Peter says you are born again through a resurrection, a resurrection presumes a death. In fact, a resurrection is the instantaneous defeat of death. In order for death to be defeated, the sacrifice had to be worthy of its defeat. That sacrifice was the God-man Jesus Christ who took on a body, a mind, and a soul because Jesus knew that in giving every part of himself, he would redeem every part of your self.

The reason he gave all of himself is because he knew he had to. He had to give every part of himself to redeem every part of us. He had to give his mind to redeem our minds. He had to give his body to redeem our bodies. It's not just a little heartsickness. It's a little death. There's no such thing as a little death. Death is just death. You can't just be a little dead. He is saying we get to proclaim this as priests. We get to proclaim this!

This is a marvelous thing to proclaim. Why would we get...? Why? Why would he do this? Why would he choose you? Why would he make you a royal priest? Why would he call you his own? Why would he invite you into a story much larger than the one you know? Because of his grace. He loves you! Why does he love you? Because he loves you. Well, why does he love you? Because he loves you. Because he loves you! Because he loves you!

"No, Matt. No. You don't understand. No." Because he loves you. "No. No. No, seriously. There's too much I'm..." Because he loves you. "No, no. You don't get it. In my past..." Because he loves you. Keep pulling back the onion. Because he loves you. Do you know those Russian dolls where you keep opening them up and there's another one inside? Because he loves you. Keep telling yourself. Why? Because he loves you. That's why. Because he loves you. That's why he would do this. Because he loves you! He loves you because he loves you.

It's his character and his good pleasure in his endless supply of love to share with you the joy that is being in his presence. He loves you. Peter now moves on to show how the staggering reality of God's love teaches us how to avoid the wrong kind of suffering and then prepares us for the right kind. We'll read verse 11. **"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."**

So let's just walk through this text. He says, "I urge," which means to exhort and encourage. This is old-man Peter talking. This is loving grandpa. This is my Bill Seal right here, just a loving grandpa just speaking love and encouragement to me. He says, **"...as sojourners and exiles..."** meaning people who don't live here but really don't live here. They're waiting on something else, but they're really good citizens. They're trying to bring another kingdom here, but they know that kingdom is not here yet.

**"...sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh..."** Which means to distance. This is his point. Because to give into these passions will **"...wage war against your soul."** That's really strong. To give into these passions will wage war against your soul. What he is saying is there is a suffering you can bring upon your life that comes at your own disobedience. There is suffering that comes as a result of you giving in and me giving in to our disobedience.

There's a correlation here. Peter is not stream of consciousness. He is not just writing this floating idea. He is building an argument. The exhortation here connects with the encouragement above. What he is saying is the degree to which you don't believe or are not believing the staggering reality of God's love for you now will affect how given you are to your flesh. What is your flesh? Paul says in Romans 7 that it's your old man. It's the sin that still dwells in your members. It has received its mortal blow. It can't win, and it will certainly lose. It's still a reality in your life.

It still builds you up, and it still plays others down. In the case of fear, the reverse is true. It builds others up, and it plays you down. It still seeks the thrill of the entire universe orbiting around yourself. Paul says in Galatians it is in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit who dwells inside of you, the Holy Spirit who is trying to manifest the fruit of God in your life. They are at war.

If you are suffering from disobedience in this war, that means you are... Now all of us battle here. All of us, to some degree, are going to suffer through this, but it means you are consistently giving into the flesh. The flesh will unravel you as all sin does and bring about a suffering that you bring upon your life. So what that means, what that can look like, is that the disobedience of addiction might bring on the suffering of a loss of job or a family.

The disobedience of arrogance might bring on the suffering and the loss of friendships. You may not be able to make any friends because you're arrogant. That's suffering for your own life because God didn't create you to live by yourself. You may experience the disobedience of unhealthiness, and so your body is suffering from a premature breakdown.

You may be giving into the disobedience of pornography, and you're suffering from a mind that has absolutely no concept of love. You've completely reengineered your mind and your heart to think love is what you manufacture in front of your computer screen or your iPod. You're suffering the disobedience that comes from that fleshly impulse, giving into that. There's a suffering you can bring on yourself as a result of your own disobedience.

The desires of the flesh, when they are not consistently uprooted, will dig down deep and cause more suffering. So maybe, like me, if I put my heart before you guys, I suffer with the disobedience of just... I call it three-fold: anger, annoyance, and impatience. I just want things to be a certain way. I want people to be a certain way. I want my wife to be a certain way. When you are not that way sometimes in the most insignificant things, it just bothers me. It ruffles me. I show my anger. I show my annoyance. I show my impatience.

Dallas is a really fleshly city. You guys know this. You live here. I think our culture reinforces... I don't *think* this; I *know* this. Our culture reinforces what our flesh wants. There was this show, this soap, back in the day, *Dallas*, which they've remade. It really, I think, personifies the fleshly impulses of our city. It's a soap. It's about inner circles, and it's about power plays. It's about beautiful women and beautiful people and loose sexuality and accumulation and upward mobility

They're all there in the story, and it's not really off. You go, "Oh, it's a soap." Yeah, but it's not really off. I think it does a pretty fair job of encapsulating some of the values within our city. Some of you guys are like, "Oh, Matt. That's old *Dallas*. That's not new *Dallas*. That's old school." I'm like, "No, that's not old school. I'm going to call you on that. It's new school. It's old school *and* new school." Our city still craves and values these things, and you know that.

Here's what I would tell you. If you are not vigilant, if you forget you are a sojourner and an exile, if you are forgetting those things, then access to these values will be so enticing to you that you'll come to recognize, if you did an inventory, that's really where you're spending your time...giving into the values and impulses of our city. Questions like what you have here, who you know here, or what you think you know here will begin to drive you.

Some of us, with the best of intentions, have gone after these things in thinking we were going to redeem them in Jesus' name, but if we really took an inventory, we would recognize we are more concerned with the comforts of these things than we are in actually sacrificing and redeeming them for Jesus' name. This is conviction on my heart. I imagine some people in this room are convicted of that too, that you are given in to the values of this city. You've realized you don't so much see yourself as a sojourner and an exile but really actually a consumer and purely a citizen of this place.

The values of our city are warped. If you find yourself right now, if you find yourself over time giving more into these kinds of values, I would tell you you're a priest in the wrong place. You're a priest in the wrong temple. You're standing in front of another glory. You're captivated by something else. That thing is not making you holy. It's not making you holy. It's hurting you. It's de-creating you.

If it's a girl, if it's a guy, if it's a person, that person didn't die for you. Even if it did die for you, it wouldn't resurrect for you. It couldn't resurrect for you because it's not perfect. It's not affirming your royalty. It didn't set its eyes on you from the foundation of time. It didn't do that. It's not a good god. It's not a good god, and so if you are here, I would tell you as your pastor and encourage you to remember this staggering reality of God's love for you in Christ.

He has invited you into a story much larger than the one you know about his kingdom. Remember Zechariah's vision too. This is important. Remember Zechariah's vision, because if you're feeling accusation, if you're feeling connection, if you feel like a priest in the wrong temple, if you're suffering from your own disobedience, remember Joshua, the high priest, the really holy dude, was there too. The Lord, knowing full and well he was dirty, still traded the very best of him and took the very worst of Joshua.

If you are repentant, if you're wanting to turn away, know God would ask nothing of you now than to approach the throne of grace with confidence. Here's what's going to happen, because he knows this is the suffering we can avoid. He knows that! He knows by his grace, we can get ourselves out of this suffering. We'll do that not by loving our idols less but by loving him more, because when you love him more, his true glory is revealed. It will reveal those idols for the junk they are over time, but it's an act of faith. So it leads out that way.

The staggering love of God teaches us how to avoid the wrong kind of suffering. Lastly, verse 12. It teaches us to prepare for the right kind of suffering. Let me read verse 12. He says, **"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."**

I told you guys in the beginning that the context of this letter is really interesting for our day, because it's a primer for future suffering. There are really some common threads going on. It was the exclusivity of Jesus Christ that was getting them in trouble. Remember, it did them no harm to deify Jesus as 1 in 100. It does us very little harm here to uphold him as some kind of good teacher, some kind of moral exemplar. There is no social credibility lost in our circles if you do those things.

Suffering comes for them and for us when you go further with that, when you say things like, "One day, every knee is going to bow to Jesus." How does Peter respond? He says to keep your conduct honorable. He literally says here (if I'm pulling from the language) to live good lives. Live in such a way that your life is beautiful or attractive. One writer says a life that is admirable in its consistency and integrity.

When they speak against you as evildoers, notice the certainty of courage. When this happens, Peter is saying our belief in the resurrected Jesus demands worship. That belief is going to be seen as evil and offensive to some. He is absolutely right. As a result, they would see our beauty and attractiveness and see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

What he is saying here is that our conduct would be so recognizably good and full of hope that they too would see the life of Christ, be changed by the life of Christ, and glorify God with us on the day Jesus comes back. That's the argument Peter is making here. Our country is ever evolving. It's ever evolving in the wide-scale respect for orthodox positions. Traditional orthodox positions are growing colder. The majority of our country now favors a view of marriage that is contrary to our orthodox view of marriage.

Then old staples of our faith like that the Bible is true and hell is real and sin is open rebellion and God himself intends things to be a certain way are seen now more and more as narrow-minded, as regressive, and sometimes as bigoted statements. I think some people would look at evangelicals by the way we've represented and say we have boxed in the human spirit and are trying to bury it and may bury... That's what they contend that, "We are ever evolving as a people, and you guys are behind."

These are really interesting times. There's this ESPN columnist, Chris Broussard, who about three weeks ago I think it was now, when Jason Collins was the first gay player to ever come out in a major sport, responded, I thought, very graciously. I watched the interview a few times. He responded and very

graciously affirmed an orthodox view of marriage in which he said, "I believe God has intended marriage to be a certain way, and *anything* outside of that is open rebellion to God."

He was lambasted. He was lambasted by so many people in the media and even by his parent company ESPN, who said it was unfortunate he said that. They don't like one superior view. They don't like the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. It is and will continue to be over the course of our history, I believe, evil and offensive to people who don't believe this. What's Peter saying? He is saying stay beautiful. Stay beautiful! Model Christ. Be attractive so when they speak against you, they'll see how beautiful he is. He says get ready for it.

As I close, I think there are two potential errors we can fall into in living out this verse. One error would be *privatizing our faith*. The other error would be *resisting suffering*. By *privatizing our faith*, I mean really going into the closet with our faith, going dark, going quiet, not wanting to really see ourselves as a stranger, trying to blend in more, proclaiming the excellencies of the Lord in bed but not so much proclaiming them during the day.

In these little impulses we have to speak, if we continue in this, if we continue in our privatization, we'll be drowned out more and more by what people think of you, how we'll be perceived. We'll begin to water down our message, if not say anything at all. What I can tell you guys, how I can encourage you is that Jesus Christ himself before all manner of critics...before *all* manner of critics...proclaimed his gospel with courage and not fear.

The gospel of John says Jesus' life is the light of man, so let it shine. Let the light of men shine in your life and glorify God through your good deeds. Don't hide your light. Don't privatize. That's what Peter is saying. Let them see how good he is.

Then the second concern, equally problematic, is *resisting suffering*. Here's what I mean by that. The tendency here would be to say, "I'm not going to suffer for my faith. I'm an American. I am buoyed by first amendment rights. I'm not going to suffer for my faith." This charge becomes more individualistic. It can manifest itself in several ways. Your language could become more political, but your MO could basically be at the end of the day to prove a point where in the point you're trying to prove, people around you won't see the life of Christ as beautiful.

They won't see your posture as honorable. They won't see your good deeds. They'll see you as really only dug-in concerned about your own individual rights. When you're spoken against and when you're antagonized, your MO will be, "No, you're wrong. I'm right. Let me prove it." The problem with that, the difficulty with this, is the Lord may very well intend in your affliction, in your suffering, in injustices done to

you, to let your gracious response, the love of Christ in you, to be the very thing that causes that person to go from death to life themselves by your gracious response in suffering.

I was in Paris in the summer of 2004. I went to study the European Union, which was super boring, but I got to be in Europe for six weeks. It was a privilege. I was in Paris on a river cruise, the Seine River cruise. I went up to the top of the deck, and, of course, I sat down next to a missionary. He and I were starting to talk. It was right there at the height of the Iraq war, right there at the height of it.

As a junior in college, a political science major, I remember saying, "You know, I'm really thankful for the movement we've made in Baghdad. I'm really looking forward to the democracy Iraq is going to have, because when they get a democracy, we're going to get to go in there. We're going to get to plant churches. When we have religious freedoms, then more people will get saved. It will be easier to evangelize." I told him all these things.

With a really, really, really gracious response, he looked at me, and he said, "Son, the promise of the gospel is that it's going to go out. That's the promise of the gospel. It's not going to be deterred. The nations are going to be glad." He looked at me and said, "Son, the gospel doesn't need rights. The gospel does not need rights." Look. I couldn't love the life of Martin Luther King as much as I do if I didn't see there's a really good way to fight injustices in the court and we'll continue to fight injustices and continue to fight for the rights of the oppressed, continue to fight for our civil liberties.

That is a good fight, but if he intends injustice, know the Lord himself is sovereign in doing that so somebody may come to faith and see the goodness of the Lord in the way you suffer. Even if American justice fails us one day, he is not going to. He is not going to fail us! So don't resist suffering. Don't resist suffering. Peter is saying a day is coming. This is coming. That's okay. Do good in it, because there's a better day ahead. It's how he ends his text (a better day ahead) and how I'll end this sermon.

A better day is ahead. A better day was on Jesus' mind. Hebrews tells us he went to the cross for the joy that was set before him. That's why he went to the cross, and that joy was his resurrection, him being with the Father at his Father's right hand. Hear me in this. Everyone who he redeemed with us, his better day was knowing we would be there with him in a way that 1 Corinthians says this is a story much larger than the one we know because we don't even know what it is.

First Corinthians says we haven't seen it, we haven't heard it, and we can't imagine how good it's going to be with him. That was the better day on his mind. So let me encourage you to a better day as well as aliens and strangers to suffer well and to show the world how good he is in your suffering if that's what he

intends. Believe the promises of God. It's staggering how much he loves you. It will show you how to avoid the wrong kinds of suffering and prepare yourself for the right kind. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for today, for your grace, for your gospel, for this message that has shaped our hearts, moved our lives. I pray now that you would pray for us. I thank you that you are, that you would contend for us, Lord, that we would believe the staggering promises that are true in Christ. Lord, if somebody has been just resisting those, that you would break through, that you'd penetrate their heart. I pray we would be those who believe this.

Lord, we would be those who prepare ourselves for whatever you have for us so we could be the fragrance and the aroma of you. Lord, whatever that looks like, I just pray we would be buoyed in the reality that you love us, buoyed in that your love is staggering and that you have fulfilled all of it in Christ, and we are his, and he is yours. Lord, thank you that we are one spirit with you now. Lord, however you can encourage, however you can bless, however you can exhort this body into greater faithfulness, greater belief, I pray you would. Lord, we love you. We thank you. We pray this in Christ's name, amen.

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