

**1 Peter 2: 11-3:7 – Living as exiles in the World – Bishop Richard Condie  
Sunday May 10, 2020 – St David’s Cathedral**

In 1972, Christian rock musician, Larry Norman produced an album called “Only visiting this planet”. He was exploring what it was like to live as a Christian in the middle of a world that had lost touch with its roots. In fact, the Dean of our Cathedral, recently posted it on Facebook as one of the 10 albums that had significantly influenced his taste in music. When I asked him why, he said:

“The songs themselves were profoundly Christian yet dealt with real world issues in a way that was literate, provocative, memorable and at times funny. The album from its title, through its music and words helped me then and still now to be a disciple of Jesus in the real world not a Christian enclave.”

The thing that has always stuck in MY mind is the title, “only visiting this planet” which made me think “If I’m ‘only visiting this planet’, then where is my true home, and how should live while I’m here?” If the Apostle Peter had seen the album, he would have known exactly what Larry Norman was on about.

It would be great if you had your bible’s at hand this morning and open to 1 Peter Chapter 2

Our text today describes us as “aliens and exiles”. Peter has just told the recipients of his letter, that they citizens of another world. They are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people”. That is, their true home and citizenship is in heaven. And so as we live in the world, we live as aliens and exiles, as transients and pilgrims, as foreigners and strangers, only visiting this planet.

And Peter knows this is a key to the discipleship of Christians in the world. As aliens and exiles he tells us to resist the desires of the flesh waging war against us in the world. He knows the temptations to blend into the world around us and be seduced by its values and delights. As foreigners, and citizens of heaven we are to resist this desire.

And in addition, we are to embrace an honourable life in the middle of the world. Listen to verse 12. *Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.*

Peter wants the Christians, who actually are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” to live such distinctive lives in the world, that we stand out. But more than that, to live in such a way as to win people for God. He knows Christians will be maligned as evildoers – even back in his day Christians were a hated minority accused of cannibalism and fed to the lions and flayed with whips. We are to live in such a way as people are drawn to God. That people might “see our good deeds and glorify God on the day of judgement”.

So, to pursue his argument he looks at three areas of life, to apply this principle. In ancient literature there was thing called “the household code”. It was a list of behaviours that were expected of people in different fields of relationships. The New Testament has a few of

these. In 1 Peter, relationships between citizens and the state, between slaves and masters and between husbands and wives. Each of these relationships, is expounding the idea of living as aliens in the world.

The overarching theme is that, when Christians live as foreigners and pilgrims in the world, they should live in submission to others. This is very counter intuitive. On the one hand he is saying, you are a citizen of Heaven, a chosen race, and royal holy nation. Your status as a believer is as high as you can imagine. But the way you live it, while you are visiting this planet, is in submission. Let's look at each sphere in turn.

### **1. The Citizen and the State vv 13-17**

*<sup>13</sup> For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. and v 17 ... <sup>17</sup> Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.*

The Christian is to be a model citizen. We are to submit to others, especially the emperor and the governors and to do what is right. The believer is not to arc up a being told what to do; to stand on our freedoms, and reject those who God has placed over us with a haughty arrogance; but we are to submit. Because by being model citizens, we commend the gospel, and draw people to glorify God.

I don't think this means that Christians should not stand up against evil and ungodly political regimes. We are to stand for truth and for the marginalized, and against injustice. But where it is possible, we ought to be the first to submit, and to be easily governed. We know that there will be perfect justice by God on that last day. We know even with the most unsatisfactory government policies, our citizenship in eternity, and membership of the holy nation, is unsullied. So, let's get on and live peaceably with those around us.

It strikes me this is easy when you like the Premier or Prime Minister, or they are from your political tribe. Much more of a challenge when they come from another angle. But the application is the same. Being a model citizen commends the goodness of the gospel.

The second set of relationships are to do with:

### **2. Slaves and Masters vv 18-20**

*<sup>18</sup> Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. <sup>19</sup> For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.*

The same principle of submission applies to the relationship between slaves and their masters. They are to adopt an attitude of submission, to accept their authority with deference. Not only to the kind and generous ones, but to the harsh ones as well.

All this sounds very foreign to our ears, as thankfully slavery is much diminished from what it was in earlier times, although sadly not yet eradicated. As an aside, I don't think that Peter mentioning the good behaviour of slaves means that he is condoning or supporting slavery. He is just merely extending his argument to different relationships in his society.

Peter's application of the alien and exiled lifestyle aimed at commending Christ, living such a good life that pagans would be drawn to Him, is that slaves too should work in humility and submission. We are so used to asserting our rights in the west. But those who live under persecution know this pathway well. Suffering in humble silence at the hands of others is a powerful witness. But more than that, verse 19 tells us, it is rewarded by God. As one translation puts it: *<sup>19</sup> For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. <ESV>*

Surely one application of this to us today applies in the workplace. Working with an attitude of humble acceptance of authority, of submission and obedience to our bosses, in the workplace – commends the person of Christ to others.

This is not easy. I have been on the receiving end of unjust behaviours. Everything in me wants to rise up and defend myself. To stand up for my rights. But for the believer, the path is humble service.

Now if you are finding this a little hard to hear, I think you are not alone. At this point, Peter breaks out of the household code, to bring us an example of why this lifestyle of submission to others, even in the face of unjust suffering is something we should contemplate.

### **Our Example vv 21-25**

<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

<sup>22</sup> “He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

<sup>23</sup> When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

Of course, the example is Jesus himself. Peter is calling us into the well-trodden path of our saviour, who has gone before us. Christ is the example par excellence of one who endures unjust suffering with quietness and humility. Echoing the words of Isaiah 53:9, Peter calls us to this example – not returning abuse for abuse, not threatening in the face of suffering, but entrusting ourselves to the impartial judge.

Here is the key! Our suffering at the hand of the injustice of others, is a moment in time, that will be dealt with by the one who judges justly. There will come a day where those who have been harsh and unjust, even the abusers, will find themselves before the throne of judgment to give an account of their lives. And the Lord will judge them fairly.

The centre of his work is set out in the next verse: *<sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have*

been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

He is one who has gone before us to bring our healing and hope. He bears our sins, so we can be free, and to live for him. His wounds bring our healing. His sacrificial service of self-giving for others, provides the model for the final grouping.

Relationships between

### **3. Husbands and wives 3:1-7**

*Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, <sup>2</sup> when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. <sup>3</sup> Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; <sup>4</sup> rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.*

Notice a couple of things here. The attitude is the same as what has gone before.; "in the same way", he says. The attitude of submission to others, in the relationship with the state, and slaves to their masters, modelled on Jesus' own attitudes, is the attitude expected in the marriage.

The particular issue is here is how the believing wife of the unbelieving husband is to act in the marriage, so as to win her husband to the Lord. Notice that she is to win him over to Christ, "without a word", by living in godly purity and reverence.

The words about outward adornment (braided hair and jewellery, and designer clothes) do not mean that we should stop going to the hairdresser, and dump the pearl necklace, and wear a frumpy great coat. They are there to point us to true beauty in the inner life. This is so liberating; that actual adornment, actual beauty, is in the inner self, of character traits like gentleness and a quiet spirit. The point is that godliness shines brighter than a diamond and is more attractive than a Gucci evening gown or a fancy hairdo by Vidal Sassoon. (I know he is dead, but I wanted a name you'd recognise).

Please notice husbands don't get a free pass either. Verse 7: *Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.*

"In the same way" with the same humble submission, modelled on Christ, husbands are to be considerate, to pay honour and respect, because of their equality in salvation: wives "too are heirs of the gracious gift of life".

Here is a beautiful picture of people valuing each other, living out the example of Christ, paying honour, being considerate, showing submission, as strangers and aliens in the world.

As I've been preparing this message, I've been aware of some of the challenging themes, that jar with our experience. I have been concerned in thinking about people working with abusive employers, or living in abusive and dangerous marriages and domestic situations. Nothing in this text requires that any person remain in situations of danger. In fact, there is nothing to suggest that any kind of oppression or violence or control is acceptable in any form. And if you are listening today and find yourself in an abusive relationship or an unsafe workplace, or in a family where there is control and violence, then it is right and proper that you get help. There is information on our website about where to go for help, and I want to encourage you today to seek it out.

## **Conclusion**

Larry Norman was right. We are called to live as if we were only visiting this planet. We are foreigners here, exiles, strangers, transients, pilgrims, because we have true and citizenship elsewhere. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. And because of this we can be bold to live just like His Son, the Lord Jesus. He is our example – suffering for us, bearing our sins in his body on the cross, freeing us from sin so that we might live for righteousness.

Our exiled life is then: abstaining from sinful desires, and living so well, so honourably, among the pagans, that they will be drawn to Christ. And we do this through active submission to others, to ruling authorities, in the workplace and home, in marriages and in all our relationships filled by love. So that on the day of judgement many might glorify our God and Father.