

What Matters-Week Four

Elect Exiles

Texts: Matthew 16:24-28, 1 Peter 1:1-2, 2:11-12

- Opening illustrations: Who has a set of dishes that are for special occasions?
 - Yeah, most of it have it. We have set something apart for special occasions, guests, to honor people who have come to us.
 - The biblical word for this is to sanctify. Things that are set apart for a special task are sanctified.
 - Now in the case of our plates, it is perfectly okay, though they are sanctified, to get out those plates, get them dirty, and clean them off again. That is why they are sanctified. If you just leave them on the shelf, you have nothing more than a plate collection. No, we sanctify these things for a special use, but the special use that we made them for doesn't mean they have to stay clean.

- This is what Peter speaks of today at the beginning of his letter. We are sanctified by God for a purpose. We are set apart for a purpose. Last week we spoke how God has made us heirs with His son Jesus. Heirs of His kingdom, the promise of salvation, but also of the work of bringing restoration and reconciliation into the world.
 - [Here I used an illustration of a person in the congregation whose life has demonstrated being a part of the family business. Whose life is showing what it looks like to be "sanctified" for the work of God's kingdom.]
 - Read 1 Peter 1:1-2 in the ESV. This is a difficult verse to translate. The NIV adds commas to this phrase. But it seems what Peter is trying to communicate to those early Christians, and to us, is that we are elected/chosen for the purpose of being scattered over the earth to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. That is what we have been sanctified (set apart) for. That is our purpose as heirs of God's kingdom and grace.
 - Give a little back story of the Jewish Dispersion of the 6th century BC, this is what Paul is relating the early Christians to in this passage. Thus when Peter brings this up, he may be touching a sensitive nerve for some of the original heirs of this letter. They don't like to think of that point in their history. But Peter does not shy away from this sensitive subject, for it communicates the very purpose of our existence as heirs in God's kingdom.

- Consider Jesus' words about a grain of wheat (John 12:20-26 and John 15). In a bin of wheat, a grain of wheat is alive, but isn't really doing anything. But when a seed is planted, it dies. But it bears much fruit.
 - Our modern farming practices don't reveal the imagery behind this passage. But back in the day, seed was broadcast, dispersed, scattered over the fields with the hope it will drop on the good soil, plant itself strongly, and bear fruit where it has landed.
 - The problem: After a harvest, far too many Christians just gather the grain into bins where they are cozy, comfortable, and safe. The trouble is, that is not the purpose of grain seeds. Grain seeds are not just meant to be put in storage bins

where they are safe and secure, but are meant to be scattered, to be broadcast over the fields, where they are to die and bear much fruit. And the process is to begin again.

- Jesus demonstrated what it means for one to die and bear much fruit. Because Christ did not stay comfortable (Philippians 2), but cast Himself to the earth where He died, He bears incredible fruit to the Lord. Christ did not stay in His place of comfort and honor, but entered into the mess of this world, gave His life for you, for me, for everyone, and thus has brought salvation and restoration in this world. We would not have salvation without Christ entering history to bear the sins of humanity. But because He has done so, because He has died, he bears fruit that will last for all eternity. Fruit like you, me, your neighbor perhaps. Maybe your coworker, obstinate family member, fellow student. You get the picture.
- We are the fruit of Christ's death. Here Peter tells us that when we are scattered, when we give our lives (literally or figuratively) we also bear fruit for His kingdom, drawing people into His kingdom and increasing His harvest.
- Peter, in keeping the idea as he concludes the opening part of his letter, tells us in 1 Peter 2:11-12 to set ourselves apart for God's task. You are an exile, scattered into the world. As we are scattered among the world, as people see the love and joy and fruit that we bear, though they may revile us, insult us, hate us, they will see the fruit of our lives and must ultimately give glory to God when He comes to them.
 - If we stay in our bins of safety, this will never happen.
 - But if we are scattered, dispersed, exiled to different corners of this community and world, God will use our scattering to bear fruit for His kingdom. We scatter and share the mercy, grace, hope, healing, restoration, and reconciliation with the people around us. As we bear fruit for God His son is honored and glorified
- And so may you bear fruit for God's kingdom, bringing hope and healing to your community as God has exiled you to the corners of this city to bear fruit that will last in His kingdom forever. As Christ died for you, may you give yourselves to others to bring them into the Lord's kingdom.
- Amen